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Understanding Deliberation in Chinese Online Society

Yewen ZHU

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Sociology, Politics and International Studies

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Abstract

With the development and popularization of the communication of information via the internet, participation in this public discourse has become an increasingly significant part of people's lives. Even in China, this discursive revolution brought on by the information age has been widely researched. By drawing on the concept of deliberation, this study has investigated online society using behaviors and thoughts of quiet participants, and associated them in the context of Chinese social and communicative culture. This study aimed to develop an understanding of the online society in China on a micro level. Taking an online forum as an example, the study collected evidences from all online messages in the first two months after the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, and interviewed 30 participants as quiet participants having experience with online deliberation. The analysis unfolded under the frame of deliberative theory on both the cognitive and moral levels in order to come to a conclusion on the basis of understanding of the online deliberation practice; specifically, the way in which Chinese culture, traditions and social conduct have both changed and influenced the online communicative thinking and behaviors of Chinese people.

The findings indicated that the Chinese online society can present a very different understanding from of deliberative theory. On the cognitive level, even though the number of abusive messages is not extremely large, the quiet participants mostly express themselves online in a supportive manner, even with opposing opinions. As a result, such actions cultivate a homogenous environment, and can suppress online reasoning to some extent. However, the study found, the major decrease of evidential information created from the reasoning process is from the majority opinion group in homogenous deliberation environment rather the minority. Moreover, the influence of the online environment to the cognitive ability of the quiet participants is to a large extent passive, impulsive, indirect and subconscious. Even though their information management ability is high, they can still be "forced", learning from the online deliberation under the influence of the "face" and the "modesty" culture. On the moral level, the findings showed that, engaging in online deliberation in an interactive way does not cause quiet participants to be intuitively moral. By focusing on non-textual and simple expressions of opinion, however, the findings revealed some potentially positive moral influences which benefited from the online deliberation environment. As an understanding of online Chinese society, the study interpreted the findings in a Chinese social and cultural context, and also discussed the theoretical meanings in the context of deliberative theory.

Acknowledgements

This research has been a long journey full of bittersweet moments. As the journey is approaching an end, I would first and foremost like to thank my parents. Without their support, I would not be able to achieve a fraction of the work I have completed. I would also like to express my thanks to my cousin, for all the support he has offered me throughout the entire process and for providing me his academic expertise.

Most importantly, I think it is a hopeless understatement to say that I am deeply grateful to have Doctor Magnus Feldmann and Professor Jeffery Henderson as my supervisor during this journey. For the past whole four years, their efforts to support me throughout the process have been invaluable to the completion of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my proof-reader Doctor Margaret Studholme for going above and beyond to help me complete this thesis and for providing such concise and informative feedback. Her efforts have been a great asset to me and my work.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: ..... [redacted] ..... DATE: 7/1/2019.

Contents

Chapter I. Introduction

For a long time, civil society in China, as defined by western democracies, was labelled "incipient" (Yang, 2003a; Brook and Frolic, 1997; Moore, 2001). It was seen as an intermediate public realm between the state and the private sphere in which citizens and civil groups engaged, organically or inorganically, as a revolutionary product, and especially as a rising wave of participation in historic civic events (Huang, 1993; Yang, 2002; Ostergaard, 1989; McCormick, et al., 1992). Very recently, with major changes in politics, economic reforms and the development of internet communication technology, the relationship between the government and the public has been remolded from its previous totalitarian mode in which the government had total political and administrative control over the flow of information and public discourse, to the semi-authoritarian mode in which new adaptations have been made to information management that so it can fit in with the new situation which is driven by economic development and regime legitimacy-building (Perry and Seldon, 2000; Brook and Frolic, 1997).

These changes in the idea and pattern of governance are significant because they have had a number of influences on Chinese society. One of these is the rise of online society based on internet communication. By 2017, the total number of Chinese netizens[1] had reached 700 million or 54.3% of the population, 2.6% higher than the average level globally in the corresponding period. Notably, online sociability and activity among Chinese netizens are especially high, as they intentionally create and consume all kinds of information every day (Yang, 2009). Not only is heterogeneity found in the content and emotions in Chinese people's online opinion expression (for example, Tang and Huhe, 2014), but also, more excitingly, the dominant component of online communication is discussion (Cairns and Carlson, 2016). As a result, statistics from The Public Opinion Monitoring Unit (2017) show that, among the top 20 hot social events of 2016, eight were a result of heated discussions on social media, accounting for 40% of the total. That is to say, nearly half of the things that captured public attention and opinions had been expressed and discussed online beforehand.

On the other hand, there is much concern about the "digital transition[2]" that is being exacerbated by online communication through all kinds of social networking tools. These make information access, and the sharing and spreading of opinion so easy that the whole process takes just one click. Algorithms then feed us content based on our interests, or things we have already liked. It is easy for us, for example,

[1] This term originated from a combination of the words internet and citizen. It refers to those people who are actively involved in online activities, users of the internet, who engage in activities such as reading, chatting, information sharing and liking online.

[2] In Bawden and Robinson's (2009) work, it is described as a move towards a situation in which people can access a great amount of information, professional or not, in a digital form instead of a traditional printed form.

to become trapped in a filtered bubble where we are only able to meet, communicate with, and be influenced by people who share our beliefs. This is believed to be how internet movements emerge, grow and become virally unstoppable (Postmes and Brunsting, 2002; Ackland and O'Neil, 2011). People are challenged with a flood of diverse opinions and can both influence and be influenced by information from others. This involves discussion on multiple levels, such as information selection (Entman and Bennett, 2001; Kavanaugh et al., 2008), self-identification with a group (Shan, et al., 2005; Michinov N. and Michinov, E., 2004), the ability to participate in discourse (Dean, 2003; Jankowski and Selm, 2000) and the expression of morality (Mercier and Landemore, 2012; Sperber et al., 2010).

As a result of the revolutionary changes brought about by internet-based communication, deliberative theory has been considered an excellent approach to the study of civil society in the age of internet communication, especially in a non-democratic context. How have such internet-based mass media and computer-mediated communications been influencing civil society? How will such influences present themselves in a non-democratic social context? Related questions have received a lot of attention since the 1980s. By applying deliberative theory to empirical studies, researchers have speculated about whether the news, concepts, and means of opinion expression that benefit from the internet-based media will improve the democratic form of civil society[3]. Even just as a form of participation, online communication is expected to reshape the ideology of society, especially in non-democratic countries (Poster, 1997; Sotirovic and McLeod, 2001; Carpini and Keeter, 2002; Mutz, 2002; Shan, et al., 2005).

On this basis, taking a deliberative perspective, this study is trying to answer the question: **What can we understand about Chinese online society through deliberation?** There are three dimensions to the study. Firstly, deliberative theory is introduced as the guide for this study. It will help us identify and investigate online communication behaviours and phenomena as evidence from within the framework of deliberation. Then, I aim to sketch out a contextual interpretation of these online communicative behaviours and phenomena by considering relevant cultural, social and political characteristics of China. The last part of the study is reflective. By building up the understanding of online society in the context of deliberative theory, it contributes to the development of deliberative theory by applying it to an outline of deliberative practice in China.

1.1 The meaning of talking about deliberation in China: Background issues

Decades of economic reforms in China have brought unprecedented opportunities and rapid development, but at the same time also challenges to governance, including media and information management. On the one hand, there is a need for the government to advance the market economy via

[3] The concept of deliberation has been involved in discussions of the shortcomings of modern democratic civil society, for example information poverty (Roger and Malhotra, 2000), political indifference (Jang, 2009), and elite domination (Dahlberg, 2007a).

the media system (Franda, 2002; Zheng and Wu, 2005; Winfield and Peng, 2005). On the other hand, the fundamental function of the media has, inevitably, changed, and it is not just a provider of information, but also a source of entertainment and advertising in order to fund itself (Chu, 1994). The new media industry in China has taken on a shape similar to that of the capitalist system, in which it is greatly influenced by advertisements, demand and supply, and capital investment. Market effects and greater financial independence allow the content and form of the media to to be more directed by the audience's preference and interest, rather than only providing ideologically driven government propaganda (Zhao, 2000). This means that although the media in the Chinese context still cannot be completely independent of government, driven by economic benefit, they do not have to draw a clear line in the sand, and are even able to test the ideological line.

In such a situation, there is a subtle trade-off reflected in the transformation of governance relevant to information control. There has been some suggestion that the Chinese government has been relaxing its grip and allowing more opinion formation and public engagement within certain bounds (Zhao, 2000; Yang and Jiang, 2015; Jiang and Xu, 2009; Zhang, 2002a; Hartford, 2005). Such decision could be compelled for some reasons, for example, online settings such as anonymity, asynchronization, the torrent of information and its unlimitedness in time and space, make it tricky to put online censorship into effect (Qin, B. et al., 2017; Mou, et al., 2011; Tang, 2009; Rosen, 2009). In reality, punishment is mostly likely to be applied only for potential sabotage at the top level, which might substantially influence people's entire existence in real life (Qiu, 2000). Moreover, it cannot be expected that the efficacy of virtual censorship will be uniform nation-wide. As some researchers have found, less restricted public communication and flows of information usually take place between people at the lower administrative level, especially between ordinary individuals (Jiang, 2008; 2010a; 2010b). It seems that there are always reasons and ways of getting around the rules, as long as one takes care not to touch the bottom line (Tai, 2014; Liebman, 2011; Qiu, 2000; Hobbs and Roberts, 2018).

As a result, recent government censorship decisions have been less about banning and more about guiding (Tai, 2014). Censorship and policing at the level of central government aim only to reduce the management risk, targeting only that small fraction of sensitive materials which have the potential to lead to collective action that threatens national stability (Qin, et al., 2017; King, et al., 2013). Public expression of different opinions, or even criticism of the government and Party leaders are allowed, as long as they are not likely to trigger collective action that threatens the administration. More and more recent studies argue that this sort of semi-open policy of information management and public expression can be an implication of the government to strengthen the regime's stability and legitimacy, identifying potential divergence, sources of discontent, and learning how to resolve contradictions and satisfy the masses (Gehlbach and Sonin, 2014; Cairns and Plantan, 2016; Tai, 2014).

1.2 The importance and significance of the study

There is no exception for China, going through the information revolution, the internet is creating a new form of society by offering more chance and space in the virtual world. The internet allows people to search, link, and interact (Bach and Stark, 2002), which creates a basic social need for access in order to understand, express, and discuss social problems (Chase and Mulvenon, 2002). People not only can communicate with each other about major contradictions and problems in public life, such as unemployment, housing, corruption or welfare, but also any tensions, discontent, hopes or concerns they have in day to day conversations, to arise the public attention (Yang, 2003b). More interestingly, this new Chinese communicative society is formed in a more unintended and nuanced way. It is further blurring the boundary between public participation and private daily activity. It is to say, citizens may or may not be aware of engaging in public participation through discussing their daily business online. Very different from the traditional concept of public participation, which always presents a high degree of mobilization or counter-power apart from the state (Yang, 1989; Simon, 2013; Taylor, 1990; Cheek, 1992; Perry and Fuller, 1991; Tang, 1991), such internet-based communicative activities are only considered in terms of acquiring information and common daily communication (Fouser, 2001). Especially, since they have no other effective channels, Chinese users may rely on such online communicative activities even more heavily in Chinese context which exerts tighter control than anywhere else (Yang, 2003a). Since the SARS event in 2003, within just a decade, some scholars have noticed that Chinese 'netizens' have begun to be transformed from a "grassroots class" to more active "citizens" as they participate more in public affairs with the help of the internet (Chase and Mulvenon, 2002). The general spread of this easy means of communication and the non-specialization of the language in which opinion is communicated, constitute the essence of civil participation in public life.

Therefore, these interesting changes require a new generation of Chinese civil society researchers to collect new evidence by considering such daily online communication as a new form of public participation. In that sense, the online Chinese society interpreted by such online communicative life needs to be addressed as a dynamic development, a historical inheritance with communicative characteristics rooted in the Chinese social, cultural and political context. On this basis, deliberative theory is used in this study as a normative "guidebook" for investigating more new empirical evidence and used to set up a general interpretative frame helping us to identify the components used for understanding the online society. However, it is necessary to point out, the focus of the research does not lie in making connection between Chinese society and democracy; for example, discussing in what way, or to what extent, democratization is happening in the Chinese setting with the help of deliberation. Instead, our interest has a more open and realistic frame, focusing on informal online deliberation, outside the political system. By applying deliberative theory as a set of normative standards, we are

interested to identify online deliberative phenomena in China, and give them richer connotations in the Chinese political, cultural and social context.

In addition, this approach, which sees online deliberation as everyday communicative activity, and discusses it at an individual level, is especially crucial for understanding deliberation, especially in a non-democratic political-cultural context like China. If we applied a democratic perspective when talking about deliberation at the level of Chinese governance, it would have to consider evidence, for example, the design of political institutions, and track the whole decision-making process, or public arrangements for deliberation. Empirically, it would be hard to have complete access for the collection of accurate information and reliable data from the online environment in China. As a result, the study tries to understand online communicative society by approaching deliberative behaviours at the individual level instead. In consideration of daily online communication in a context like China, this perspective is even more interesting and necessary. It breaches the limits of seeing Chinese practice in terms of isolated authoritarian traits by only talking about the concept at the institutional level and allows us to investigate "third spaces" (Wright, 2012) in a different social and political environment. As Chen and Reese (2015) put it here, the changes brought by the development and use of the internet have highlighted the potential for public engagement to a greater extent, but at the same time also the tight supervision of public discourse. Precisely because of the prevalence of political control, the mixture of policy and unique Chinese culture has transferred everyday talk to a broader online space in which public communications happen in a more subtle than obvious, and more ambiguous than easily detectable, way (Rauchfleisch and Schafer, 2015; Wright, 2012). This approach to studying deliberative practice in China allows us to take a close look at the real struggles of individual Chinese people participating online, taking into account Chinese internet culture, rather than simply assuming a situation of poor civil engagement because of the very visible top-down regulation and control (Chen and Reese, 2015; Yang, 2009).

In particular, when these deliberative phenomena and behaviours are addressed using a cultural approach, it means they are given a new interpretation by contextualizing thoughts and feelings within the local social and cultural background. In fact, recently more and more empirical researchers and deliberative theorists have encouraged us to understand the concept of deliberation apart from the democratic system, to see this theory in different social, political and cultural contexts (for example, Fishkin, et al., 2010; Rosenberg, 2006; He and Warren, 2011). As the result, many hybrid regimes, or communicative phenomena clearly committed to authoritarianism showing no intention of a transition to democracy, can still be understood by applying the notion of deliberative capacity without involving democratic transition and consolidation (Dryzek, 2009a). That makes China one of the hottest cases in deliberation studies. As He (2014) pointed out, the reconstruction of deliberative practices in China is different because it bears traces of inheritance from Chinese history and culture that influence the

language of deliberation, for both citizens and the party, in a way that is appropriate for China (P. 59). By understanding online Chinese society from the perspective of deliberation, this study also has tried to begin to explore Chinese normative standards for the deliberation model.

1.3 The Roadmap of the Study

In Chapter 2, I have tried to construct the theoretical frame for this study in three steps. First, I defined the very core definition of deliberative theory, deliberation, by considering the recent development of deliberation studies and the online communicative setting of the case study. I then set up the context in which deliberative theory can be applied by introducing the relevant background information about China. Secondly, I systematically analyse the key theoretical discussions of deliberative theory to build up the theoretical framework from both the cognitive and the moral angle. Finally, I further develop both the methodological and theoretical foundations for the subsequent data collection and analysis by reviewing previous empirical studies.

In Chapter 3, I offered a full description of the methodology used in this study. The main research methods, including content analysis and interview, have been selected and well-designed for several reasons. First, I explained in detail the design for selecting research material, including the case study of an online forum, the online deliberation textual material and identification of participants. Importantly, in the second part of this chapter, I also talked about the assessment design. This means to simplify the process of mass information-coding, -focusing and data reduction. At the same time, it helps the study to create a map on which I can build up the relationship between each finding and the relative normative standards discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis.

In Chapter 4, I used two specific Chinese social and cultural concepts and three online communicative settings to outline the context of the deliberative practice of talk on China at a cognitive level. This chapter begins with a general introduction to the way two Chinese concepts, the modesty concept and face culture (as two major influential inheritances), which play a large part in shaping communicative behaviours and the logic behind the online text-based expressive content. Three online communicative settings are also listed in the later part of this chapter, including anonymity, information overload and asynchronicity. These settings have challenged, to varying degrees, the rules and thinking that people apply in offline communication, such as Chinese modesty and the face culture which have inherited from the traditional communicative culture and conventions. However, in this chapter, I do not mean to rush into any analysis or conclusion, of how or to what extent online settings affect the deliberative pattern of Chinese people for example. The purpose of giving a contextual base here, is to enable us to complete more profound analysis and interpretation of our findings on online deliberative practices in later chapters.

The Chapter 5 is the empirical part. In this chapter, I reviewed Chinese online deliberative society by presenting all the findings on the cognitive aspects, and come to an understanding of online deliberation by exploring explanations for these findings. By focusing on the cognitive aspects, I analysed findings from online materials and the interviews respectively. This arrangement takes into consideration that deliberation should be understood as a compound concept of communicative content and behaviours. The former is related to text and language, and the latter to people as deliberators. Collecting data from both online materials and interviews offered me two perspectives, micro and macro, to get a more complete understanding of deliberation.

Similar to Chapter 4, in Chapter 6, I set up the analytic context for understanding online deliberation on a moral level. Two traditional social and cultural concepts are first introduced, which play a significant role in Chinese communication especially in the moral sense: Renqing (a sentimental-value-based relationship), and the value of harmony. To give a relevant online communicative context, two online settings are also discussed in this chapter: invisibility and the minimization of status and authority. Likewise, the online settings, to a different degree, have changed moral standards and structures for people dealing with each other compared with offline communications, which creates some expectations among readers regarding the interpretative account of online deliberative practices that appears later in Chapter 7.

In Chapter 7, another empirical chapter, the study presented the findings from the online research materials and interviews on the moral level. It tried to answer the questions arisen in Chapter 6. However, it is different in the sense that deliberative practice in a moral sense is more difficult to trace from the text-based evidence in a macro perspective. As a result, the core of the analysis of the moral sense in online deliberation practices lie more in the interview materials, focusing on participants. At the end of this chapter, therefore, I was able to review the online deliberative practices of the target participant group, coming to some interpretation and understanding of the behaviours by taking the moral perspective of deliberation.

In the concluding Chapter (8), on the basis of summarizing all our findings on online deliberation at both a cognitive and moral level, I suggested that the study has offered an alternative interpretative account of understanding online civil society through online forum communications between ordinary citizens, as informal, daily and dialogic kind of deliberation. Beyond this, the chapter suggested that the study is an example of how deliberative theory might be applied in non-democratic context as China, to help exploring the different normative standards of deliberation model with local political, social and cultural characteristics.

Chapter II. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The chapter introduction

In this Chapter, I outline the three steps I took to construct the concept of online public deliberation, to further identify the available theoretical frame that is operationalized in this study:

1) First, I define the concept of dialogic deliberation, by considering the recent development of deliberation studies and online communicative settings, which further identifies and justifies the range and objects for later analysis in this study. Then I set up the background context in which I will be applying deliberative theory by describing China's online environment. This helps to further build up the theoretical frame by answering two questions: a) Why choose this theory? (in other words, why is it suitable for studying China) and therefore, b) What elements of this theory are useful for studying China? (in other words, why China is a good case study for deliberative analysis?)

2) Secondly, I sketch a systematic analysis of key theoretical contributions to the core constructs of public deliberation. This allows us to extract the fundamental aspects of deliberative theory, cognitive understanding and moral understanding from among all the constructs that can be argued to contribute to the phenomenon of online public deliberation.

3) Finally, I incorporate recent related findings and review the relevant literature on empirical studies of public deliberation. By reviewing wide-ranging deliberation-related research in such areas as communication, participation, online behaviours and psychology, I first of all create a guide to the ongoing direction of this research, while also suggesting, secondly, some other approaches based on relevant empirical findings and thinking that I can borrow for subsequent data collection and analysis.

2.2 A context for theoretical construction in China

2.2.1 Define Deliberation

First of all, we need to qualify the scope of the definition, what is deliberation? In the past 10 years, the term deliberation has been widely used in multiple fields such as media communication (Zhou and Moly, 2007; Dahlgren, 2005), clinical psychology (Sankar and Jones, 2005), political philosophy (Bohman, 2000; Gutmann and Thompson, 2000) and sociology (Maynard and Manzo, 1993). Each definition refers to different forms of

communication useful for specific research contexts and questions. In this research, we want to limit the definition to serve a particular type of deliberative practice - online deliberation, or internet-based communicative interaction through computers, which is a discursive participatory phenomenon based on the platform and communication technology of the internet. It has been widely discussed in political and social fields (for example, Fishkin, 1991, Davies, 2009; Perrin and McFarland, 2008).

Based on this consideration, even though we have a rich literature that enables us to define deliberation within the framework of democracy, we will not limit our definition to the democratic form, for two main reasons. First, for most democracy theorists, democracy is more likely to be a normative political ideal which is hard to implement in the real world (for example Skinner, 1973; Dahl, 1989). Therefore, if we define the concept based on this standard and the nature of democracy, we would set the bar so high as to make it difficult to find actual democratic practice that fits the description. This issue has been discussed by some theorists of democratic deliberation, such as Dryzek (2006) for example, who says that if we filter communication that happens in the public sphere according to normative democratic standards, it will not be wholly, or even mostly, deliberative, as in the case of propaganda, deceit, and manipulation. In cases of that sort, we can only discuss to what extent they either meet or more or less violate deliberative ideals (Dryzek, 2006: 29). Second, as we mentioned in the introduction, if we limit the definition of deliberation to a democratic context, it restricts the scope of its application and the development of the theory in other political and social contexts. And to investigate deliberative activities, making sense of them in a non-democratic Chinese context is exactly the interest and focus of this study.

In this respect, we prefer not to define deliberation by its democratic nature, but using another taxonomy, talking about it on two dimensions. The first dimension is, as Pateman (1989) described, a domain of professional politics where the role of deliberation is more instrumental, so called instrumental deliberation (Kim and Kim, 2008). Here, as one of the deliberative elements, outcome occupided more weight in deliberation, as it is more treated as problem-solving procedure on an institutional level, focusing on group cases and collective action (He, 2006; Gutmann and Thompson, 2000; Habermas, 1996; Benhabib, 1996; Sanders, 1997; Cohen, 1997a). The other dimension, in comparison, is more focusing on every day, individual and contextual. Not only political, such dialogic deliberation is also discussed from the perspective of sociology and psychology, analysed as the communicative behaviour, logic, mental activity

and relationships between individuals (Kim and Kim, 2008; Mercier and Landemore, 2012; Mendelberg, 2002; Sommers, 2006; Young, 1997; Rosenberg, 2006).

As a new approach examining deliberation, dialogue deliberation encompasses a more casual, free, aimless and everyday style of communicative interaction between ordinary citizens for self-expression, in which they share information, and try to understand each other, to form rules, values and public reason as normative deliberation requires (Kimand Kim, 2008: 53). The analysis of communication in politics used to remain at a macro level. From election campaigns (for example, Price and Cappella, 2002), to media networks (for example, Scheufele, 1999), quantitative evaluation was the preferred approach to the analysis of changes in public opinion formation. Little attention was focused at the level of interpersonal communication; for example, to researching the emotions, values, social rules and cultural factors that contribute to deliberation in people's communication behaviour, and relative discursive influence. Understanding has therefore been limited to normative standards, but the real dynamic communicative process and thinking process remains a mystery (Ryfe, 2006). In response, incorporating the concept of dialogue into the study of group deliberation is a good way to complement the interpretation of deliberation from theory to practice. From a dialogic perspective, communication is not neutral, but constitutive and consequential, which means the focus is more on the process and context in which the communication happens (Escobar, 2009). They shape the communicative behaviour, the people in the communication, and the communicative relationship built up between them (Austin, 1990). This is especially so for verbal communication in politics, as daily political talk is known to transform private spheres into the public sphere, and citizens cannot identify political society without communicatively interacting with each other (Chaffee, 2001). Also, the structure of power is more and more related to how people both exert discursive influence and are influenced in communication (Fischer, 2003). This gives the origin for deliberative democracy understanding the discursive social practice of everyday political life.

The development of internet technology has largely promoted the research trend which takes daily, casual, dialogic style of deliberation as another important form of discursive public participation. The traditional, formal and institutional forms of political communication, for example discussion between elites only, or elites deliberating for show in front of their audience, are not sufficient for an understanding of the connection between communication and politics. Deliberation, as discursive communication in people's daily political life, can also develop in

the midst of dialogue, thus becoming a common and necessary part of politics (Kim and Kim, 2008). At the same time, however, such deliberation still has the attributes of daily dialogue. It is usually less structured, and not guaranteed to meet certain favourable conditions designed for formal, standard deliberation (Black, 2008). Consequently, it may also be important to lessen the gap between empirical study and deliberative theory by paying more attention to deliberation on an interpersonal communication level, connecting individuals to their relative context (Fischer, 2003). Such an approach, rather than simply collecting empirical evidence according to the theory, will be more useful, especially for cases which unwittingly serve different ideological functions (Fischer, 2003).

Therefore, in this study we apply the definition of dialogic deliberation to the analysis of deliberation between ordinary Chinese people in their everyday lives, as well as a specific type of online deliberation, the online forum. This is based on two considerations. First, dialogic deliberation is not just defined by focusing on the result of adversarial pattern of communication of traditional politics. Although conflicts emerge in deliberative conversations, it is not put emphasis on for the purpose of the possible final result. In the case of this study, people who participate in online communication are not necessarily prepared for difference in advance, nor driven by divergence and conflict developed just from difference. In fact, the content of a dialogic communication can be multidimensional, such as exploring, extending, learning, clarifying, inquiring, or simply information exchange, all of which can be involved in the dialogic process of deliberation (Tannen, 1999).

Compared to the concept of traditional political communication, involving the relationship between the public, politicians and the media, the focus of dialogic deliberation among ordinary people is more about how, as individuals, people build a sort of connections with each other, and with society, through the communication (Tannen, 1999). It is understood that one's position is not static over time, nor even quite definite in the beginning, but can be formed gradually during the communicative process, driven by inquiry and curiosity for example. That is to say, argument is something can be developed during the communication, and we are open to more mindset and scenarios to understand the conflicting commumication and the people in it. For example, as Escobar (2009) suggested, if people would rather express to learn than to persuade, listen to understand than defend, and communicate for the collaborative possibilities than self-interest driven win or lose. It better suits what Habermas (1998b) described as the

"lifeworld" which is constructed by communication between the social and cultural sense of individuals.

Moreover, although certain forms of consensus can be arrived at in the process of dialogic deliberation, it is not set out as a pre-determined aim or result of the communication. In other words, dialogic deliberation will not necessarily be a task-driven communication. Compared to the traditional model of political communication, dialogic communication is more of an open-ended and un-coerced conversational interaction (Heidlebaugh, 2008, Habermas, 1998b; Kim and Kim, 2008; Escobar, 2009). "Truth" emerges through the course of the dialogue with the deepening of the conversation (Stewart et al., 2004). When people communicate in the form of dialogue, there may be more than one purpose, such as the delight gained through socialising, and the need to maintain effective social relationships (Pearce and Pearce, 2004), rather than the conflicting agenda only. In this sense, dialogic communication is processed more as a way to open up a "transparent agenda rather than strategic one, communication as co-creation of meaning and emphasis on gaining understanding of an issue by creating shared meaning and exploring difference" (Escobar, 2009: 55). It also puts the focus more on the communicative conditions, process and outcomes, such as mutual understanding, bringing attention to certain issues, inquiry, and information-sharing, rather than the result.

Furthermore, when considering the case of online deliberation, we need to further define dialogic deliberation by including some aspects of the online forum used in this study. The Tianya online forum has features common to other open-types of Bulletin Board System. First, it is a huge multi-information repository. Every web user who logs into the online forum can be an information resource. They offer information as individuals from various backgrounds. Moreover, the number of participants can be limitless, as they can join in the forum without restrictions of time and space. This kind of communication is also recognised as strongly interactional. People communicate with each other online in different parts of the forum. There are usually four ways to engage in online deliberation: 1) random assortment, meaning people can communicate with others at random about random topics; 2) common topic (for example military, entertainment, politics, and society); 3) functional grouping (for example online secondary trading, or house rentals); 4) fixed group (usually for online gamers). Anyone can start a new topic by posting online, and reply to any of the people who leave comments below at the same time. Likewise, the people who write comments can also develop a discussion with anyone who reacts to their comments, or participate in any branch discussions developed from

the original topic thread. As such, communication can be one to one, one to many, or many to many. Besides this, the communication also shares some of the characteristics of online communication in general, such as anonymity, asynchronicity, and especially invisibility. People cannot communicate with each other except through language as text and symbols. Other visual factors, such as facial expressions and acts are usually not available for deliberation.

However, in defining dialogic deliberation for this study, we cannot be limited to the design of the online form per se. As Preece (2001) put it, to investigate the design for usage is not the most important task, as the more important purpose is to understand how such a design supports the communicative interaction based on it, and whether it promotes sociality in some way. That is to say, our consideration of the design of forms for online deliberation should not be limited to the design per se. Rather, it should be extended to a focus on communicative interaction and sociality as consequences of the communicative design.

Going a step further, we believe that the dialogic form of online deliberation is at first an activity that happens in people's everyday social lives. This means that topics of dialogic deliberation are not just political. A discussion can begin, for example, with something as big and serious as political issues at state level, or with "small" issues related to individual self-interest in their daily lives. That is to say, any discussion involving public concerns can be considered dialogic deliberation. Secondly, this daily deliberative activity is considered to be a form of public participation. Although compared to typical offline public deliberation in politics[4], posting and commenting online may be nothing more than the expression of personal opinion, information seeking, or simple comments (which are sometimes made with no expectation of any type of response), online settings can still strengthen and promote sociality under different conditions from offline face-to-face settings. According to Deleuze and Guattari (2010), "becoming" is actualized in an interactive process in which development only happens by making connections with all one's surroundings. Talking specifically of the online forum style of deliberation, influences such as the aggregation effect are involved along the

[4] For offline deliberation settings, some deliberation democrats used to hold strict standards to define deliberation in practice. For example, Gastil (2000) thought the standards to make a communication deliberation must include critical listening, rational justification, sufficient consideration and consensus as the most appropriate collective decision or solutions. In a similar tone, Fishkin (1995) had very strict ideas about evaluating deliberative practice, believing that communication was inadequately deliberative if any participants' ideas are not fully responded to, or if supporting information was absent from communication, or if there were any participants unwilling to weigh the argument.

way to information "becoming" opinions. By making a connection with its environment, information is shaped and scaled, turning individual personal opinions into a collective voice and actions. In that sense, every information-holding individual can play a part in the informative interaction, going through the "becoming" process.

For a similar reason, the definition of dialogic deliberation we use in this study not only refers to discursive interactions presented in the form of textual messages, such as written posts, replies and comments. We consider much more, including all kinds of non-textual deliberative activities, including deliberative thinking, information clicking and viewing, liking and sharing, which are all part of the content of online deliberation. In offline face-to-face communicative settings, social rules, which make sense of communication in real life, demand that at the same time as taking in information (by listening for example), we give certain responses to make sure the communicative segment is unbroken, or that we can continue the conversation if we wish. As a result, we can hardly separate the actions of taking and giving information, or treat each as an independent communicative activity. The internet has changed social and communicative patterns greatly. Function buttons designed in online forums allow people to share, recommend, like and view separately without necessarily giving a response.

Information-taking, in this way, can happen not only independently, separately from information-giving, but can also exert its influence on an even greater extent than offline communications. For each original topic posted, there is always a counter for the number of likes, clicks, and replies it gets, and how many times it has been shared or recommended. This becomes an important indicator for people who are drowning in a flood of online information to make a choice about what to pay attention to (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013), and a good approach to studying the discursive relationship in the online world as well (Rogers 2002; Halpin and Tuffield, 2010). As some deliberation theorists point out, compared to the ideal normative concept, the practice of deliberation in real life may not always be as normative as defined. It is not even always direct communication between two or more citizens, but sometimes even refers to refers to indirect communications, for example the thinking process, reflected in the whole deliberation as we survey it (Lindeman, 2002). On the internet especially, communicative practices such as clicking, sharing, recommending and liking, give us a chance to take a more micro perspective, not just to study communication based on textual language, but also the thinking process as a necessary part of dialogic deliberation in everyday participatory life.

2.2.2 Why this theory? The meaning of introducing deliberative practices from China

The concept of deliberation has usually been discussed with the aim of achieving better democracy in a practical sense. Deliberative theory has been used to emphasize the democratic foundation and values of equality, freedom and rationality in dealing with conflicts and resolving divergences. As a result, deliberation is easily confined within the framework of the institutional system, taking place mainly between elites under the decision-making model, and tied closely to formal, procedural and institutional political patterns and influences. Such an approach to deliberation studies is problematic, because it has caused the definition of deliberation to be identified within a very narrow normative form of democratic discourse (for example, Gambetta, 1998; Sanders, 1997; Young, 1997), which could undermine the value of the theory in other forms of political practice. However, as Chambers (2003) argued, not all endorsement of deliberation can be considered as deliberative democratic theory. In his opinion, democratic theory is a more restrictive domain than appeals to deliberation (Chambers, 2003: 308). This trend is also a response to some critics of the very limited and ideal deliberation model built only upon the democratic context, bringing up the question: to what extent can deliberation can better grasp the realities of political life (Dryzek, 2009). Thus, deliberative theory is becoming more and more recognized as a "neutral" theory rather than a theory of democracy.

As a matter of course, deliberation can play the same, or even a more important role in democratizing, hybrid political systems and even authoritarian political systems. Deliberation is usually associated with collective social and political movements, because formal deliberation between elites and the public is considered to be weak and absent (for example, Benhabib, 1996; Habermas, 1996). Deliberation per se is a kind of communication. In certain settings, some norms are prioritized over others, but this will not change the nature of deliberation, and the form and function it takes on in such political and social environments. Effective deliberation, to some extent, should promote a sound balance between representation and publicity for the sake of the political system, including non-democracies. In fact, the concept of democratic transition and consolidation has been questioned by many democratic scholars (for example Bunce, 1999; Collier, 1999). Many hybrid regimes, or regimes clearly committing to authoritarianism, showing no intention to make a transition to democracy, can be understood by applying the notion of deliberative capacity without mentioning democratic

transition and consolidation (Dryzek, 2009). As a result, recently, more and more empirical researchers and deliberative theorists have been encouraged to understand the concept of deliberation apart from the democratic system, in different social and political contexts (Dryzek, 2009; Chambers, 2003). China, in this case, is one of the hottest areas in research (for example, He, 2014; Jiang, 2009; He and Leib, 2006).

The fact is that in this era of the internet and information, Chinese society seems to be undergoing a transition in which the contemporary political and social landscape is reconstructed through deliberative practices. As a matter of fact, understanding Chinese civil society on this point is a way of adapting the trend to extend deliberative understanding to the cultural dimension. As Rosenberg (2006) pointed out, for example, culture affects deliberation mainly by shaping people's communicative relationships with one another, as well as the social identities that let them know where to stand, who to be intimate with, and to trust, as well as when to be more individuated, or more connected to a certain entity. More importantly, such a cultural perspective can be considered on an individual level. That is to say, to be an individual citizen engaging in discursive interaction may be not only to participate, for example, in the dominant public culture, but also to be linked by communicative meanings and ideas shaped by individual social experience. Culture can be the knowledge and judgment they use to contribute effectively to deliberation (Kitayama, 2002). In that sense, as He (2014) pointed out, what makes the reconstruction of deliberative practices in China different is that it has inherited traces of Chinese history and culture, which has impact on the language of deliberation for both citizens and the party to what is appropriate for China (P. 59).

2.2.3 The cut-in angle: The special role of deliberation in investigating everyday Chinese online society

Studying the content of public engagement has been considered to be the main approach to understand civil society, especially in the sense of communication. Civil engagement refers to efficient connections among citizens through the political system, issues, organisations and institutions that create chances for active participation, and make a difference to the political process and results (McCoy and Scully, 2002). Although the forms of public engagement can be various, communication is always the key to creating and strengthening such connections (Escobar, 2011; Spano, 2001). This is also supported by political reality, democratic and non-democratic, which is why increasing public engagement always requires some form of civil dialogue and public communication. The value of communication in civil society, identified by the ideal democracy model, lies with every citizen in society, beyond their different

backgrounds and connections, not only making citizenship function through aggregating similar interests and ideas into one, but also by getting their voices expressed and heard, as a reflection of collective action that aims to influence politics (Guinier, 1998; Boyte and Kari, 1996; Shumer and Pitkin, 1982; Young, 1996).

With the growth of the internet, revolutionary changes in communication have been moving civil society to the virtual arena of cyberspace, where communication represents the main public engagement. And online society, in this sense, is identified as a structured interactive network that is constructed from a series of online communicative activities influenced by certain characteristics of particular social, political and culture environments. The internet not only allows the public to have more online information access, but also, instead of the traditional communicative way of "one-to-one" or "one-to-many", creates more modes of interaction - "many-to-many" - to give ordinary citizens more say. How have such internet-based mass media and computer-mediated-communication-based social media been influencing civil society? How will such influence present itself in a non-democratic social context? Related questions have captured a lot of attention since the 1980s. Online communicative activities, mainly consisting of information exchange and sharing, are on the one hand expected to improve some adverse indicators of the offline democratic form of civil society, for example information poverty (Roger and Malhotra, 2000) and elite domination (Dahlberg, 2007a). On the other hand, they suppose that news, concepts, means of expression, and participation opportunities benefit from internet-based media and will threaten authoritarianism, naturally enhance democracy, and bring critical changes especially to non-democratic countries (Poster, 1997; Sotirovic and McLeod, 2001; Carpini and Keeter, 2002; Mutz, 2002; Shan, et al., 2005).

To this point, deliberative theory has offered excellent grounds for us to investigate and understand online civil society. It was originally discussed as another liberal approach to the interpretation of legitimacy by shifting the focus onto what Habermas (1996) called "communicative power". As a critical response to liberal democratic theory, it addresses issues such as minority influence (Wood et al., 1994), the legitimacy rooted in willingness (Freeman, 2000), inequality in participants' ability (Cohen, 1997b) and moral disagreement (Gutmann and Thompson, 2000). It was expected to be a means of alleviating, improving and correcting current democratic ideas and practices (Cohen, 1997a; Habermas, 1996; Chambers, 2003; Dryzek, 2009a; Gutmann and Thompson, 2000). With the rise and development of internet

communication, the focus of studies of deliberation have shifted from formal, institutional and agenda-setting forms of deliberation to more daily, dialogic and task-free forms of deliberative communication between ordinary people as common social activities. As Elstub (2010) pointed out, after the first and second generation of deliberation studies developed the concept by taking a close look at deliberative democratic issues in a more practical way, the recent trend in deliberation studies, the third generation, pays more attention to macro case studies of deliberation, focusing on communication happening in the informal public sphere (for example, Parkinson, 2006; Baber and Bartlett, 2005). Informal deliberation refers to those informal conversations that take place outside of the formal political realm, such as daily social interaction between ordinary people closely related to their everyday life. As the basic idea of deliberative theory is to develop the power of communication by encouraging people to gather together, sharing information, expressing and exchanging opinions, then informal everyday political conversations surely fit into this category. This kind of informal, dialogic, daily-life-based form of communication is even more valuable for our attempts to understand civil society through an individual-group perspective (O'Flynn, 2006).

It has been noticed that as one of the most influential theoretical concepts in the continuing hot debate about the potential influence of the internet in certain political environments (Chadwick, 2009), deliberative theory offers a new bottom-up perspective for re-evaluating - and understanding - different political phenomena in different political contexts through the internet. As Walsh (2004) observed in her study, "Much political interaction occurs not among people who make a point to specifically talk about politics but emerges instead from the social processes of people chatting with one another" (p. 35). Although the argumentative exchange of opinions between ordinary citizens in everyday life can not reflect all the strict criteria of normative deliberation, or micro deliberation (Elstub, 2010) that contribute to a rigorous, fully-functional, mature means of communication for a democratic system, deliberation can still be approached on a practical level by considering certain dialogic moments with deliberative characteristics (Neblo, 2014). As a new topic attracting more and more attention, many empirical studies of online communication use this theory as a way to measure, evaluate and understand people's online communicative behaviours and online communicative phenomena as processes or outcomes for better understanding of public engagement, and civil society (for example, Price and Cappella, 2002; Towne and Herbsleb, 2012; Gudowsky and Bechthold, 2013).

In social and political contexts like China, this deliberative perspective on daily communication is even more interesting and necessary. First, it goes beyond the boundaries of an institutional level understanding of Chinese political practice, which is strongly ideological. In most of the early literature, the understanding of deliberation in Chinese practice showed a very strong sense of political dichotomy, trying to determine the nature of the concept according to its instrumental value for the political system (Kornreich et al., 2012; He and Thogersen, 2010; Leibold, 2011). In this way, deliberation was confined to the institutional political system, taking place mainly between elites for decision-making purposes, and tied closely to formal, procedural and institutional political procedures and influences. As a result, misconstruction happens if we simply push out other forms of deliberative activity that are not within the democratic frame, or not within the institutional political system, and come to the misunderstanding that there is only one model of deliberation (He, 2014). As a matter of fact, the informal kind of deliberative communication between ordinary people, especially in the case of China, is more than common, random or irrational daily social activity, but has its own special political sense. As we know, formal political talk is not encouraged and is highly supervised, although Chinese people do still have a chance to talk in a more spontaneous, life-style way to work around the traditional definition of political talk (Hay, 2007; Ekman and Amna, 2012), or to avoid being seen as a potential threat in terms of connected actions (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). This kind of "non-political", casual, spontaneous daily communication gives the public more freedom to engage public political life. Thus, if we focus only on Chinese deliberation at the institutional level, we miss an important part of understanding the deliberative context in China.

More importantly, by taking the perspective of deliberation, such political (but not exactly political) online participation can be approached from a more individual perspective. The informal "non-political" communication emerging in the online sphere is especially crucial to investigate, as a so-called "third space" (Wright, 2012), for understanding online society in the Chinese social-political context. As Chen and Reese (2015) put it here, the changes brought by the application and development of the internet have highlighted the special case of China, which is situated between the wide-ranging diffusion of diverse information and the information handling ability of Chinese people; balanced between the potential for greater public engagement, and tight supervision of public discourse at the same time. By understanding on a more individual level, we are able to detect the subtle rather than the obvious, the ambiguous rather than well-defined space that deliberation as daily talk has

created in a broader online space (Rauchfleisch and Schafer, 2015; Wright, 2012; Jiang, 2010b). It allows us to take a close look at the real struggles of individual Chinese people who participate online, taking into account Chinese internet culture, rather than simply assuming a situation of poor civil engagement as a result of the visible top-down regulation and control (Chen and Reese, 2015; Yang, 2009).

2.3 A systematic analysis of the fundamental constructs in deliberative theory

2.3.1 Talking about deliberation on the cognitive level

In this study, I apply deliberative theory as a guide to help us investigate and understand the deliberation practice in China. It mainly unfolds on two dimensions, cognition and morality. In this section, I shall take a further step, extending the detail of the discussion of these two aspects by considering deliberation on online forums as a daily, dialogic form of deliberation. At the cognitive level, deliberative theory offers two approaches, the concept of difference and the ability of the participants. The value of the concept of difference in deliberative theory comes from the need to improve democracy by finding a discursive solution for diversity in social reality. For that reason, difference originally refers to differences of opinion, which constitute the foundation and basic model of deliberation. To better resolve such differences, deliberative theory has developed the discussion of difference beyond the demission of information exchange to a wider cognitive domain, involving thoughts on, for example opinion formation, opinion preference transformation, personal standpoint, values and identity. This sort of discussion brings more ideas to understanding deliberation on the cognitive level and the influence it brings to public participation and participants.

In terms of citizen ability, deliberative theory is mainly approached via information management. For most deliberative theorists, for example Gunderson (2000), Barabas (2004), Zaller (1992) and Gutmann and Thompson (2000), deliberation is first of all a kind of information exchange for constructing a system of discourse. The task is to understand and improve democracy by thinking about how people use information to exert influence, and correspondingly how they are influenced through communication. In this account, ability is mainly discussed in relation to the two cognitive processes of taking and giving information (Bohman, 2000), involving activities such as information selection, analysis, sharing and expression. Such abilities, furthermore, can not only influence the flow of information, thereby affecting the formation of preferences and opinions as well as transforming them, but can also bring into play a bigger question concerning equality of opportunity and influence (Knight and

Johnson, 1994), and the legitimacy of the deliberative process and the outcomes (Fishkin, 1991; Dryzek, 2001).

2.3.1.1 The 'disagreement' in deliberation

Seeing deliberation as an information-learning mode, deliberative theorists firstly understand the deliberative process by addressing the concept of difference (Young, 1997; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Bohman, 2007). An instrumental perspective in politics understands difference as the key to explaining political movement and conflict (Elshtain, 1995), since politics must face the reality of diversity on so many intersecting dimensions (Dougherty, 1992). In that sense, difference is always the cause of conflict and divergence (Sunstein, 2002; Lugones, 1994; Mutz, 2006). It is considered to be the origin of deliberation, which was later promoted as a problem-solving process in politics (Habermas, 1996; Cohen, 1989; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996).

A liberal point of view discusses "difference" from the point of view of self-interest and the framework of competition. They emphasize the importance and uniqueness of the individual's interests, and how dominant values are created by devaluing others. Individuals are seen as separate and independent agents. As such, people can go about their own business, rather than being responsible for connected action led by general principles (Beiner, 1992). Liberals believe that unity only occurs between individuals with similar interests, when a single individual is too powerless to influence the overall situation (Heywood, 1994). In this way, the we-group identity is formed and strengthened, as is the difference between we-group and other-group. This also makes talk between different interest groups difficult, so that it becomes harder to settle differences than to escalate them into radical conflict. Even though liberal democracy considers the idea of the group to be occasional and transitory, consisting of the sum of the similar interests of group members, they inevitably rely on groups to increase their power, gain legitimacy, and achieve their will by creating a situation of conflict (Habermas, 1994). In a democratic context, they are supposedly opposed to the need for this, as it reflects undemocratic values such as inequality and oppression. However, in reality it causes more distinctive group differences. Moreover, as group members, individuals are also imperceptibly influenced by group ideology. This influence could make people abandon their values and individuality by become more competitive than cooperative group members, manifesting and distinguishing their group identity by strengthening the differences they are supposed to have from the others

(Sherif, 1966; Bornstein, 2003; Yamagishi and Kiyonari, 2000). Such consequences are what liberal democracy is trying to avoid.

In response, deliberative theory addresses the discussion to the cognitive level. First, it does not deny the inevitability that individuals act through social groups in public life. As a solution to conflict, it sees that difference is not something created, but is given in people's lives. More than one scholar believes, regardless of disagreement and difference, that there must be an underlying consensus in the deliberative model waiting to be discovered (Hardin, 1999; Habermas, 1997; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996). For that reason, it seeks the common good (Freeman, 2000), reasonable cooperation in the common interest (Bohman, 1997), and a collective solution to conflict (Young, 1997). Since deliberative theory puts so much emphasis on "commonality" to resolve differences, one could argue that deliberation would function better in a like-minded environment in which all group members share the same interests, and agree on the same values (Moy and Gastil, 2006). Such view, however, is critiqued by deliberative democrats as a lack of pluralism (Young, 1997), and conflict avoidance (Dahlgren, 2009), which ignores the basic elements of deliberation – i.e., being deliberative (Bohman, 1997).

In the deliberative view, the key to the issue is that the common interest and consensus are not achieved by obliterating people's attributes as individuals. Young has discussed the dialectical relationship between the individual and group from three aspects. First, she points out that the feeling of belonging of individuals in a group does not necessarily point to a fact that all the attributes of the individual are consistent with all the attributes of the group. Individuals cannot avoid some inborn differences (in intelligence for example), and some differences are constituted by social fields, such as structural relations of power, resources, location, or environment-affected intelligence (Bourdieu, 1985). Such a sense of belonging possibly resonates according to part of the individual's experience in the group (Young, 1997). Secondly, even though they are influenced largely by affinity with the group in behaviour and thinking, which contributes to forming part of the individual's own identity, their group position may not necessarily be as significant as one's whole identity (Young, 1997). This is especially so in the relationship between the individual and the group, as the attributes of the group cannot be fixed for the individual forever. Thirdly, even though a group is formed by individuals who share similar values, interests, strategies or other considerations, there is no guarantee that the group,

as a whole, will meet the expectations of each group member (Young, 1997: 388). That is, difference will always exist even within a group, between individuals as group members.

As we see, instead of understanding the formation of groups only by interest, deliberative democrats take a relationship perspective, seeing group as a form of association in which individuals are positioned with their own personal attributes through actively interacting with each other. The sense of "common identity" is not simply defined on the basis of self-regarding individual interests, but in the course of interactive relations with one another that are produced through communication. In this regard, individuals are independent in the sense of acting out their own personal attributes, but at the same time develop their identities under the influence of their affinity to the group and connection with it. As Young (1997) pointed out, the deliberative model offers a chance for individual participants to identify a group as part of their characters, which enables their attachment to the other group members, sharing the problems that need to be solved. This perspective sheds light on why the deliberative model has a greater requirement to engage in "common" ground, but still sees difference as a necessary condition for proper deliberation.

Seeing difference as a foundation, the focus of deliberative theory is not that difference necessarily leads to polarization and antagonism. Rather, difference is embodied by the process of forming better understanding, and making more reasonable decisions on the basis of diversity. The history, or a social formation, is created, in that sense, by interaction between different groups. Every different opinion, compared to the whole, is partial. Every perspective, compared to the generality, is special. In that sense, different opinions are not understood as opposite and contradictory to each other. Instead, they are partial, special individual experiences and understandings based on different personal attitudes, and a different material focus. Deliberative theory thus believes that what makes a deliberation deliberative is the diversity and comprehensiveness of information.

To this end, participants are expected to make a continual effort, both giving and responding to reasons to make a proper deliberation (Gutmman and Thompson, 2000; Bohman, 2000, Cohen, 2003; Gambetta, 1998). The reasoning process is prior to the effect of nurture, and works by forming an individual's cognition anew, even though people are expected to give certain reactions, activities and thoughts according to their own pattern. One contribution to this understanding is what Blackler (1995) called "embodied knowledge". According to Zuboff (1988), such knowledge is learned, depending on people's physical presence, and required by

doing through interaction (Suchman, 1987), which is rooted in specific contexts. This process can also be understood as mutual, organisational-information-learning related to how the group identity changes over time as the insights and metaphors people bring to the discourse can be used and redeveloped by others through talking (Nonaka, 1994). For these reasons, the deliberative model is believed to be inclusive enough that individual preference can be transformed through the power of communication as, for example, previously held opinions can be questioned, improved, or reinforced in the learning process (Barabas, 2004).

As an extension of deliberative theory in practice, deliberation in online forums may contains representations of difference, and shows evidence of its influence. Difference can be applied to the study of online opinion exchange in the context of conflict between different opinion groups. Some research has found that people only engage in online deliberation with like-minded others, in order to avoid the negative consequences of divergence and conflict (Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1998; Sunstein, 2001; Bimber, 1999). Such homogeneity is held to be responsible for a sharp fall in the number of different opinions involved in online deliberation (Bimber, 2003), leading to a less comprehensive and less diverse small group deliberation environment (Howard, 2005), which brings the value of deliberation as a learning process further into question (Price et al., 2002). However, evidence from other findings shows that, not only are people are more likely to get involved in deliberative conversations with those who have different knowledge and opinions (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997), they also enjoy this sort of communication for a gratification they cannot get through offline conversation (Stromer-Galley, 2003; Shan et al., 2005).

In this study, "difference" will be used mainly in the context of conflict, focusing on communicative interaction between opinion groups. Some aspects of related empirical studies have caught our attention, for example, a good online deliberative discussion actually depends on the degree of divergence (Stromer-Galley, 2003), degree of internet skill and knowledge (Tambini, 1999; Bonfadili, 2002), and trust between people in communication, or the norms of the public discussion space (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001). By studying "difference" in opinion formation, we shall figure out what changes and influences specifically deliberative activities have brought to aspects of information collection and exchange. As we are guided by deliberative theory, these changes and influences should then be better understood by associating them with more contextual evidence gained from our interviews.

2.3.1.2 The ability of participants in deliberation

Another aspect of deliberative theory on the cognitive level focuses on citizens' ability to participate discursively (Cohen, 1997; Mendelberg, 2002; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Chambers, 1996; Yankelovich, 1991). From a deliberative perspective, a genuine democratic political process should be justified by public explanation, interpretation and communication (Habermas, 1996; Kim, et al., 1999; Dahlgren, 2005, 2009; Dahlberg, 2001; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Carpini, et al., 2004). However, this process can also be understood as argument and persuasion on a practical level (Knight and Johnson, 1997). That is to say, deliberation requires that people have the skill to develop their claims with reason, so that they can exert influence on others through communication. Considering an online deliberation model mainly as an exchange of information, we discuss both information-taking and information-giving.

Discussions of information-use in accounts of offline participation focus more on the capacity to give information than to take it. Participatory practice in voting-centred democratic systems has been criticized for its political apathy, with citizens who are ill-informed and inactive (White, 2000; Putnam, 2000). In this situation, as Warren (2002) has pointed out, the key contribution of deliberative democracy is that it has improved the procedural drawback of democracy, which is that equality cannot be truly achieved through equal voting, with a public that has a substantially similar level of reasoning and judgement. Legitimacy (according to deliberative theory) should be earned through a legitimate democratic political process in which decision are justified through public interpretation, explanation and interaction (Habermas, 1996; Kim, et al., 1999; Dahlgren, 2001; 2005; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Carpini, et al., 2004). This emphasises that citizens should be sufficiently informed to participate equally and efficiently in the political process. Furthermore, deliberation is considered to be a more active form of engagement of the condition of reason-giving (He, 2006; Austen-Smith and Feddersen 2006; Patty, 2005). That is to say, it means that participants need to engage actively, and that efficiency of expression is an essential ability. If someone, no matter for what reason, cannot actively engage, and effectively takes more information than they give, they will be unable to exert their will, and will consequently have very limited influence on collective decision-making (Knight and Johnson, 1997).

However, information-taking has received much more attention, as it is considered as one of the educational gains of the deliberative model. In discursive participation, the emphasis lies

on the legitimacy which is created in the deliberative process by wide, equal, free and fair mass discursive participation. Only in such a form of participation can deliberation function as an "in-built discursive model" (Benhabib, 1996), help to overcome the limit that makes political outcomes mere "pure procedural justice" (Elster, 1998), and turn discursive participation in to a public decision-making agenda. Deliberative theory proposes that no single person could ever know everything necessary to make the best decision, and that no one could be capable of predicting all the relative perspectives, standpoints and interest relationships in a particular issue. Admitting that public issues are very complex, and that society is very diverse, deliberation is used as a learning process to gain information and knowledge from the conversation, to first understand the nature of a problem (Gastil and Black, 2008).

To be specific, we understand information-taking here as the ability to select and analyse information. In the public reason model of deliberative democracy, the legitimacy of deliberation is established through reasonable communication, which requires only some types of information. As Tjiattas (2001) pointed out, public reason has particular requirements concerning the manner of deliberation, in which the reason and evidence used to support one's claim has to be well selected, which "mobilizes 'conversational constraint' or 'selective repression', specifying what types of reasons citizens may and may not adduce to defend their points of view" (p. 119). This points to a discussion of the way information is selected and processed mentally for the formation or transformation of opinions.

As the foundation for opinion formation and transformation, deliberative theory proposes, the individual self can be reflected and recognised during communication (Habermas, 1996). The bigger achievement of learning is that we are expected to better understand both conflict and each other's interests to find shared meaning during communication (Bohman, 1996; Cohen, 1997a). Overall, the deliberative model drives opinion-taking in two ways. In one, the participants are in the information environment to learn. That is a process analysed as "considerations" by Zaller and Feldman (1992), meaning that before individuals show their opinions, they learn from arguments, rejecting or accepting information to finally form their consideration for later evaluating political issues. In the other, opinions can be changed by later informative communication. With all kinds of information, prior views and individual preferences will change according to how the participants listen to, and consider, other people's opinions.

In online settings, the ability to take in information, as a learning process, can be even more valuable than information-giving (for example Hicks, 2002; Gastil and Dillard, 1999; A. G. M. J. and Dijk, 2006; Jankowski and Selm, 2000). Instead of accessing information through interactive communication, the internet encourages learning by acting as an information base and resource that conveniently offers a massive amount of information, without people necessarily engaging in communication. It allows a series of information-accessing activities such as browsing, inquiring, selecting and absorbing that could be treated separately, and occur before text-based expressive behaviours in communication.

On the information-giving side, besides expression as an important evaluation skill for online participants, deliberative theory emphasises expressive thinking just as much. Different from the other version of the participatory model, the deliberation model discusses possible causal connections between expressive thinking and behaviour. By focusing on a daily dialogic kind of deliberation, deliberative theory also enables us to develop expressive thought, among other expressive behaviours. Such an approach can be used to explain, for example, public rationality, and minority influence (Mendelberg, 2002; De Dreu and West, 2001; Smith, Tindale and Dugoni, 1996). As Dryzek (2000) defined it, "This is deliberation of a sort, but only in terms of the weighting of arguments in the mind, not testing them in real political interaction…" (p.15).

Such deliberative thinking is seen as part of the opinion-forming process that happens before expression but has to be motivated by the intention to apply related expressive behaviours. Early in Arendt's (1967) discussions, she described the thinking process as "the more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while pondering a given issue and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusion, my opinions…" (p. 115). Because of the expressive intent and desire one has for verbal expression, one might have better motivations, aims and representative standpoints for opinion formation and the proper organization of words, so that information can be efficiently integrated in the mind for more effective communication. The significance of expressive thinking has been recognised by many deliberation researchers as one of the key learning outcomes in deliberative communication (Gutmann and Thompson, 2000; Habermas, 2005; Kwak, et a., 2005; Scheufele, 1999a; Eveland, 2004).

In particular, the significance of expressive thinking as a part of deliberation is more and more highlighted in online expression. In offline face-to-face communication, although expressive thinking can directly involve our expressive behaviours, its role is usually not as significant as other forms of expression, such as words and behaviours. In offline conversation, the social rules usually require us to respond in a timely way in words or actions to maintain the communication. Since thinking time is quite limited, responses are more likely to be a kind of instinctive reaction to the context and content of the communication or the emotional atmosphere, or the communicative ability and experience that participants have previously learned. Unlike offline communication, expressive thinking can proceed more independently, as an activity separate from verbal expression. For text-based online deliberation, some online settings, such as asynchronicity, offer participants more time to form expressive thoughts (Wegerif, 1998), to integrate information and organize language, the better to express it verbally if they then choose (Ping, et al., 2001).

Taking all this together, to develop the analysis of the cognitive level in a later chapter, we investigate the text-based messages in online deliberation to understand the concept of "difference", and develop our understanding of participants' cognition, including the way they identify themselves in interactions and their cognitive competence in information-taking and -giving. To investigate the online information-taking situation, we emphasise information selection and analysis as separate but important parts. Studying these enables us to get close to those who do not put their thoughts into action as written expression, by searching for clues to their non-textual expressive behaviours, such as liking, sharing, clicking and viewing as outcomes of online deliberation.

2.3.2 Talking about the morality in deliberation

Discussion of moral deliberation originates from the solutions to some defects in democratic political practice. In an ideal deliberation model, deliberation is expected to promote legitimacy, rationality, equality, justice, individual autonomy and respect for individual interests and rights by giving reasons, sharing information, and making better arguments (Habermas, 1996; Gutmann and Thompson, 2000; Chambers, 1996; Cohen, 1997a). However, deliberation can fail to achieve those values in reality as a result of unfavourable conditions, such as the inequality caused by social or economic factors, a lack of reciprocal consciousness, or even in some cases an unwillingness to cooperate. In reality, some democracy theorists point out that deliberation can allow the capable to realise their own interests in the name of "being

deliberative" through strategies such as persuading others to sacrifice their interests for good reasons, especially those in a weaker position (Dahlgren, 2009; Sanders, 1997; Warren, 1995). According to this view, they need another political actor, rather than power and money, to regulate the rules of the game. Under these circumstances, moral deliberation is widely talked of in terms of, for example, reciprocity (Gutmann and Thompson, 2000), exhaustion (Fung, 2005), minority rules (Smith et al., 1996; Turner, 1991), or as enabling the necessary rootedness of deliberative theory in practice (Misak, 2002).

Although there is plenty of inspiring theoretical literature, it is still a big challenge to arrive at a research design that allows us to study, empirically, deliberation in the moral sense (Thompson, 2008). After all, evidence may be quite limited, and perhaps be displayed only in speaking and writing online. We need to investigate it at the level of thought. Consequently, we must reconstruct theory to guide us towards two approaches to online deliberation at a moral level: detecting moral phenomena and interpreting moral phenomena. To detect moral phenomena, we will discuss deliberation in the moral sense along two dimensions: deliberation between an advantaged and a disadvantaged group, and between a minority and a majority group. Furthermore, a micro perspective will be used to investigate some dialogic features of the online participation of Chinese people for their online deliberative behaviours. This will enable us to offer an understanding of any moral phenomena in online deliberation, both text-based and non-text-based, by later combining the findings from both micro and macro perspectives.

For this study, I plan to address deliberation at a moral level from two key perspectives that guide the later empirical analysis. First, deliberative democracy theorists focus on deliberation in the context of conflict between advantaged groups and vulnerable groups from a macro perspective. Here, deliberation is considered as a necessary precondition for a problem-solving approach to creating political legitimacy as well as for better outcomes from decision-making (Palazzo and Scherer, 2006). The norm is usually to control and reduce divergence by emphasizing rationality as an important deliberative condition. Namely, the advantaged group should be tolerant of a variety of opinions, particularly to the disadvantaged group for taking a complementary or even oppositional stand and engage in active response to form a reasonable and effective deliberative process (Schauer, 1999; Foley and Edwards, 1996; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996). From such a perspective, being deliberative is a way for advantaged groups to gain legitimacy. For example, this could be a way for the government to exercise their power

and governance on the basis of common ground. As an improvement, the deliberative model is also expected to represent the will of each individual participant (Parkinson, 2006; Knight and Johnson, 1994), especially those in the disadvantaged group (Sanders, 1997). In this sense, legitimacy is not only present in the outcomes per se, but also for the later implementation of collective action (He, 2006; Taylor, 2003; Cohen, 1997). From the perspective of advantaged groups, therefore, moral values are more associated with such qualities as responsibility, empathy and concern for the need of vulnerable groups (Sander, 1997; Cohen, 1997a; Rawls, 2001; Fung, 2005).

Secondly, deliberative theory also sees ordinary citizens as individual participants, studying deliberative behaviours in their daily communicative lives. In this dimension, rather than just examining political outcomes and influences, deliberation theorists take a more microscopic perspective, considering deliberation as a form of interpersonal communication; the focus shifts to the specific characteristics of individual participants, such as their language, interactions and the communicative context they are in (Fischer, 2003; Hendriks, 2006; Kim and Kim, 2008; Young, 1997). Moral deliberation, from this perspective, is not necessarily driven by the outcomes designed into the normative deliberation model; for example, consensus or problem-solving. That is to say, in a moral sense, the standard of deliberation is not always in keeping with deliberation-friendly designs. For example, as some studies have discovered, moral deliberation may work between individuals, helping them to solve conflicts, but it could also undermine deliberative cooperation between groups (Insko, et al., 1993; Bornstein, 1992). Especially, when in-group members realise they are in the minority, their sense of identity would be strengthened by moral deliberation between group members, which contributes to a tense standoff, and makes cooperation between groups even harder (Bettencourt and Dorr, 1998). As we can see, reason-based deliberation could bring a double standard to understanding deliberation in the moral sense.

This difference is further highlighted when we talk about the case of group polarization and minority influence. When most people's opinions are incline to one side of a deliberation, it may promote the majority influence, silencing and marginalising other minority groups (Schkade et al., 2000; Meyers et al., 2000; Lugones, 1994). However, deliberative democracy proposes that equality should not be achieved just through rights and procedure, but also through ability and will (Habermas, 1998). In that sense, majority rule is only a valid way of delivering democratic outcomes if it is also achieved at a substantive level, namely reaching

consensus based on the opinion and will of each individual participant (Habermas, 1998; Wheatley, 2003). This gives minority opinions sufficient attention and expects them to exert a certain influence in the political process too. In a moral sense especially, deliberation would be considered a failure, and not different from the liberal model, if the minority only served a result-oriented process as ornaments.

Coming to minority influence, we are able to complete our understanding of deliberation in the moral sense by investigating the other side of the story. Minority influence has been considered as the standard of evaluation of whether deliberation can deliver some democratic hopes, such as changing minds, empathy, rationality and equality (Mendelberg, 2002). Some researchers suggest that the deliberative influence of the minority, even though it may not change the whole direction of opinion, will force the majority to be exposed to various matters of which they might otherwise have remained ignorant (Wood et al., 1994). A reflective perspective, for example, can be contributed by the minority consistently arguing with the majority, who then put themselves in the minority's place, making them rethink that why there is always another voice, and how to persuade the dissenters (Moscovici, 1980). In other research, such thinking is discussed in terms of open-mindedness. In a more indirect, unconscious way, with the involvement of relevant information and critical thinking, people may critically evaluate new arguments and evidence, promoting a change of mind (Mugny et al., 1991), especially in a group in which the norm is to value original thought and innovative information and opinions (Mendelberg, 2002). Theorists therefore consider that consistency is the key to ensuring the influence of minority groups in the deliberative process (Gebhardt and Meyers, 1995; Kruglanski and Mackie, 1990). In other words, minority influence can only be efficient when members of the group are consistent, inflexible, rigid and less persuadable (Wood et al., 1994; Moscovici, 1980; Smith et al., 1996).

We will therefore investigate online deliberation at a moral level in two dimensions, between an advantaged group and a disadvantaged group, and between a majority and a minority group. As we discussed above, to consider a deliberation morally good, the advantaged group, which may not be the majority group in some cases, should make space for the disadvantaged group to be heard loudly, and efficiently and for their voices to have an influence on the deliberative process. That is to say, instead of making use of their advantage to downplay or ignore, the advantaged group should invest effort, engaging in the conflict by giving proper attention to the opinions of the disadvantaged group, and trying to create a positive interaction by actively

responding to them. Considering the other dimension, between a minority group and a majority group, the moral meaning of deliberation lies in creating and strengthening a like-minded in-group environment for the minority group. That is, the minority group, who are also the disadvantaged group, should be able to present their interests and demands by persistently making their voices heard, and taking a stand. We consider that such a design can be used as a model to investigate the moral value present in daily public online deliberation.

2.4 A review of recent empirical deliberation-related studies

2.4.1 A material approach: Online deliberation as online behaviours

Recently, an approach to studying online deliberation as everyday communicative activity has been developed from an evolving understanding of public participation, known as the materialization of public participation (Marres, 2011), or material participation (Marres, and Lezaun, 2011). The concept of material participation locates public engagement in everyday material practice, focusing on the role of things, objects and technologies in the facilitation of everyday public life (Marres, 2011). It involves actors (ordinary individuals traditionally seen as participants), their actions (as a performance effect, for example behaviours, psychology and phenomena), the context and the settings (which cultivates specific ways, or patterns of object-using). To see public engagement from a material perspective is not new in politics, although the role of material things has either been excluded from the main components of participation, or completely overlooked, since classical political theory suggests that real citizens will not be fully transformed until autonomous individuals can separate themselves from the material world, discarding self-interested motivation, and making rational decisions by considering the public interest (Pateman, 1989; Pocock, 1998). For modern sociology also, material entities are believed to be the cause of the death of community consciousness (Latour, 2005). The object turn has only happened recently in the empirical study of politics, in this scientifically- and technologically-developed society. As some scholars have noticed, traditional and conventional forms of participation are stepping away from the stage (Putnam, 1995; 2000; Verba et al., 1995). By really considering the positive effects of the use of certain objects, technologies, or settings, enabling rather than disabling, public involvement in the embodiment of everyday material life, this new form of participation, which is looser, more informal, life-style-related, and less motivation-effort-invested, becomes the new focus of participation studies (Lichterman, 1996; Williams, 1998; Putnam, 2004).

This framing of public engagement in terms of everyday material life has therefore emerged as a modified approach, based on traditional ideas of participation in political theory. There are two key contributions to the trend here. The first is a call to take a more practical perspective. Political theory, in the past few decades, has worked to realise as far as possible a wide public participation in real political life, in other words, to make public engagement "easy" enough (Oswell, 2008). One of the major manifestations of this is the boom in various types of discourse participation (Stilgoe and Lock, 2014), which is expected to fix the democratic deficit. The concept of discourse participation has turned "talk", one of the most common activities in people's everyday lives, into a form of engagement in which the role of the public is discussed on a more individual dimension, as a so called "mini-public" (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006), to highlight the way wide participation can be achieved in a popular, basic and effortless way for ordinary people.

More importantly, such object-centred studies of participation are not seen only as a sub-field, or background to the study of politics, but more studied as a material form of politics with the latent force characterized by materialization which facilitates the power of engagement (for example Braun and Whatmore, 2010; Kelty, 2008; Marres, 2007). As Marres (2011) pointed out, the materiality of participation used to be excluded from the main components considered in participation studies, but it indeed plays significant role to the public in the whole involvement process. Paying attention to the role objects or technology play in participation does not mean we have totally shifted our emphasis, or that we are admitting that they change the substance of participation. Rather, it allows room for a wider interpretation, focusing on material things, technologies or the settings themselves, "how objects acquire 'powers of engagement' and how those powers of engagement are articulated, discussed and contested in the public domain" (Marres and Lezaun, 2011: 495).

By following this trend, with the materialization of online participation to a great extent created by network communication technology, we are able to deepen our knowledge and understanding of deliberation by considering the interaction between online communicative behaviors and the corresponding online platform that structures such behaviours (Gerlitz, 2016; Marres and Moats, 2015; Birkbak, 2013). Known as technologies of participation (Thrift, 2008), these have not only made communication more convenient, easy and low-cost through all kinds of social software, but also facilitated the public activity of the autonomous and private individual in return for minimal effort. Effort is not exactly minimal in a quantitative sense, but

the involvement is driven by the phenomenon of "co-articulation" across multiple different domains[5] instead of by a singular purpose just for participatory performance (Callon, 2009). As a result, unlike offline deliberation which features certain communicative behaviours, online deliberation can all be featured as the data of the platform on certain application field for researchers.

This brings both challenges and opportunities for identifying online data as the object of research. Firstly, as some scholars have noticed, even on the same platform, the data can be created by participants involved may come from diverse interest and value backgrounds, and use the platform to be connected with each other (Gerlitz, 2016). This makes identifying the data source based on the target application especially important (Tsou, 2015). Secondly, the same data can serve for different study values and purposes[6] (Gerlitz, 2016; Boyd and Crawford, 2012), which makes it necessary for researchers to set up a model of the data, and address difficult questions to the model, before really engaging in analysis. As online data collection allows us to conduct analysis with no limit to the breadth, depth or scale (Mackenzie, 2012), it is important for researchers to be aware of how they originally define information/data which can have multiple values or purposes at the same time (Gerlitz, 2016). This offers an interpretative base from which to identify data, and from which to make sense of it in the first instance (Gatelman, 2011). More importantly, it offers the chance to re-interpret the meaning of facts/ actions/phenomena present in the data, allocating new values and new sets of relationships, contributing to the development of the knowledge we use to understand it (Berry, 2011a; Gerlitz, 2016). Thirdly, data is meaningless without the context. That is to say, you have to identify the data by considering the data-creating context (Tsou, 2015). For example, in the case of online communication, researchers need to draw attention not only to the "grammars of action", the text and links (Rieder, 2013), but also to the content beyond it, which is also enabled by social media's designed-in functions, such as likes, retweets and shares.

[5] According to Marres (2011), material participation has challenged the traditional concept of participation, which can be limited to a singular space of political moral engagement. Instead, material participation is based on the "co-articulation" of different spheres, such as economy, science and other wider domains in which there is public engagement with politics (Marres, 2011). In her discussions, she explained that the carbon accounting device enabled what Donald MacKenzie (2009) calls "a space of equivalence" in which energy use, financial management and environmental cost can be translated into one another (P. 519).

[6] For example, according to Boyd and Crawford (2012), technology means to be used for analysing data as technological phenomenon, maximizing computation power and algorithmic accuracy to gather, analyse, link, and compare large data sets; Analysis involves seeing data as scholarly phenomena, to identify patterns in order to make economic, social, technical, and legal claims; while mythology refers to the widespread belief that large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with the aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy. (P. 663)

Researchers also need to maintain a balance, dealing with the interactive relationship between the data's content and the digital setting of data analysis. As suggested by Marres and Moats (2015), the object of the analysis should be approached from both perspectives, the issue-specific perspective and the platform-specific one. And instead of arguing about which is the more apposite, researchers should take advantage of the productive confusion between the two, making the findings interpret, verify and supplement each other.

Accordingly, particular features will be used to identify online data as 'deliberation' for the purpose of this study. First, the data could be categorized as social life data (Tsou 2015), including social network information from popular social media online forums. Yet, collecting data from a source of communication does not give it communicative meaning. Therefore, the data model is set to what Marres and Moats (2015) have called controversy - the dominant characteristic of online communication was always concerned with some topics or events or problems that interact with some aspect of social media or digital culture itself (p. 1). Associating this with deliberative theory at the cognitive level suggests that the dynamics of opinion formation and transformation involve both discursive aspects (for example Dahlberg, 2001a; Brice, 2002; Young, 1997), and individual aspects (Wood et al., 1994; Taber et al., 2001; Barabas, 2000). On the moral level, such a communicative format can detect the ways that particular people's communicative behaviours reveal moral meanings (for example Gastil and Dillard, 1999; Larson et aI., 1998; Smith et al., 1996). So, by identifying and analysing the data as opinion information, the task's goal is first of all to transform the online data into the online deliberative situation/phenomena using deliberative theory, and then to reflect on the theory by re-interpreting the phenomena measured by the data. Last but not least, by considering the setting of an online forum, we find that opinion expression is not only in the form of text, but also in other non-text-based forms such as liking, sharing, clicking and viewing. This means, that besides textual data, the object of research also includes data derived from non-text-based expressive activities.

Therefore, online deliberation has the specific characteristic of encompassing both behaviour and content, which require analysis from both issue-specific and platform-specific perspectives. Since deliberation per se is the "issue" here, focusing on the content of the text, for example the rhetorical analysis of particular topic-related text, is not exactly the approach that works the best. Instead, content analysis is usually applied to the meaning of the content, to examine the patterns of such communication (for example Albrecht, 2006; Wright and Street, 2007;

Graham and Witschge, 2003). Precisely because of this, online deliberation is also presented as communicative behaviours that need to be understood by considering the effect of the functional design of the platform (for example Mendelberg, 2002; Barabas, 2004; Graham, 2010). I will come back to this point, discussing details of the methodological design based on the "symmetry principle". In this Chapter, however, my focus is to set up the foundations, and point out the direction of the later data analysis by outlining substantive findings, both theoretical and methodological, from previous relevant research.

Two aspects get significant attention in studies of online public deliberation. One of these is deliberation in the sense of opinion exchange. This line of discussion mainly focuses on information flow during the deliberative process, involving a series of deliberative phenomena, such as homophily (for example Medaglia and Yang, 2017), and polarization (for example Stroud, 2010), and the corresponding deliberative influence on the people engaging in the process, such as compulsiveness and persuasion (for example Stephanie, et al., 2002). The other aspect digs into the deliberative mind behind the behaviours. In this respect, Galston (1994) suggested two ways to study deliberation in the moral sense. Both of them point to the study of online communicative behaviours and deliberative minds. The first involves those deliberative characteristics that can be observed at an individual level, such as purposefulness, the ability to be tolerant, the willingness to make progress by talking things through, being respectful, and the ability to distinguish the speaker from the conversation. The second lies in people's intention to create and strengthen a deliberative relationship with others, such as loyalty and honesty in opinion expression, concern for the other, and feeling responsibility for the well-being of others.

2.4.2 Understanding deliberation as a process of opinion exchange

One important issue in the study of online deliberation as an opinion-exchanging process is to ascertain whether it can create a good amount of issue-relevant information and have relevant effects, such as knowledge-learning, and ability-learning through various online communicative behaviours with other participants (Pasek et al., 2009; McLeod et al., 1996; Musick and Wilson, 2008; Conroy et al., 2012). Some studies have supported the assumption that engaging in deliberation does create more knowledge. For example, by studying the electronic dialogue project in campaign 2000, Price and Cappela (2002) found that not only was knowledge created through participants' deliberating with each other, but it continued to increase over time. Others have tended to be critical in their empirical analysis of online

discussion. According to Wilhelm's (2000) findings, for instance, only 15.5% of the sample messages from an online forum were replied to; 27.9% of the sample messages were posted to request information from others; 67.8% of the sample messages were aimed at claiming and spreading participants' own opinions. He concluded that online discussion is far from being deliberative, and is no more than self-expression and monologue (Wilhelm, 2000). This sort of situation is argued to be responsible for the reduction in communicative heterogeneity online (Sunstein, 2001). This significant difference in existing research results suggested two questions. First, what online phenomena can we study to evaluate the extent to which something is an ideal deliberative discourse? And secondly, what impact does such online discourse have on participants in terms of delivering a good, or not so good, outcome from deliberation?

In fact, online deliberation researchers have explored some basic variables based on plenty of empirical evidence, which has been used to evaluate the extent to which online discussion situations, as a process of opinion and information exchange, constitute a near-ideal deliberation state. For example, in Schneider's (1997) study, online discussion was evaluated by four variables relevant to the concept of communication in the public sphere: quality, equality, diversity and reciprocity. With more and more empirical findings, the study of online deliberation is not limited to discussing those features, as mentioned above, which only relate to deliberation, but which neglect or exclude other interesting communicative features and online phenomena as part of the empirical studies (Freelon, 2010). As such, empirical studies focus not just on investigating online practice led by deliberation-oriented elements and values, but also involve discussions of multiple factors by critically incorporating into their discussion the liberal individualistic understanding of communication and the communitarian model, which contribute to forming online behaviours and the communicative minds of participants, which in turn revolve around two basic opinion conditions, homophily and antagonism (Albrecht, 2006; Towner, 2013; GildeZuniga, et al., 2012; MacPherson, et al., 2006; Ridings and Gefen 2004; Spears and Lea, 1994; Luskin et al. 2002; Price, et al., 2002).

2.4.2.1 Homophily and Polarization

In empirical studies, opposing opinion flow, usually represented as homophily and polarization, is considered to be a necessary starting point for studying online discussion as an opinion exchange process (Lev-On and Manin, 2009). In deliberative theory, diversity is considered to be a necessary factor in the deliberativeness of a communication. In deliberation practices,

however, some studies show that people are more likely to choose, and only choose, information in which they are interested or with which they agree, but filter out that which they do not agree with, especially in a diverse online information environment which can produce the best possible result for freedom and autonomy in information management (Conover, et al., 2002; Kim, et al., 1999; Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005). As a result, even though we are exposed to a highly diverse and comprehensive opinion information background, we could inevitably be affected by internal segregation and narrowcasting, which becomes one of the major concerns of deliberation researchers studying online practice. In this sense, the meanings and values of deliberation do not necessarily lie only in different, diverse information, but more importantly, in the heterogeneity of participants' opinions and background, which have to be reflected in opposing views (Lev-On and Manin, 2009).

By targeting opposing views, one approach to understanding the potential deliberativeness of online communication, as Lev-On and Manin (2009) suggested, is to investigate participants' possible reactions. Following this line of collection, some research shows that, even though people are exposed a diversity of information online, they mostly try to avoid those that oppose their own so as not to experience any psychological discomfort from challenging or being challenged by others' opinions (Ryfe, 2005; Eliasoph, 1998). Also, as plenty of research points out, with limited time, energy, attention and ability, people are more likely to be lazy, always choosing a shortcut, or even making themselves "immune" to different and opposing opinion information (Delli, et al., 1996; Kinder, 2002; Lippmann, 1993). Moreover, some other researchers, especially those who work on the social and cognitive influence of computer-based communicative settings, have discovered that, under some conditions, consciously or not, online communication can create a kind of social pressure, or as Spears and Lea (1994) called it "panoptic power[7]". This sort of effect can suppress, to some extent, the expression of opposing opinions, which is considered to be one of the major causes of polarization and homophily (for example, Sunstein, 2009; Spears and Lea, 1994). Another finding related to such online communicative phenomena is so called "collaborative filter[8]" by Lev-On and

[7] That is to say, especially in the communicative settings mainly based on words and audios only, people can be more sensitive to textual clues by sensing the panoptic situation for compensating the missing contextual clues, thus leading to stronger effect of social norms on people's behaviours, such as in-group bias and out-group (Spears and Lea, 1994).

[8] Collaborative filter, in Lev-On and Manin's (2009) study, is explained as one of the online settings working as an information filter. It is designed based on automated mechanisms, filtering popular content for participants according to the rating they give as a feedback.

Manin (2009). This is considered to be a short-cut for participants, enabling them to efficiently and publicly filter out more "expert" information, although, at the same time, it creates the situation of the tyranny of the majority online, aggregating information segregation (Lev-On and Manin, 2009). Those findings seem to have supported assumptions about the way online deliberation functions to suppress or filter out opposing opinions, meanwhile promoting interaction between groups and like-minded people to create a more homogeneous information and communicative environment which is the result of polarization (Gilbert et al., 2009; Sunstein, 2002).

2.4.2.2 Antagonism: Flaming online

On the other side, relevant studies have offered abundant evidence showing that the online communicative environment is not that simple and homophonous, suppressing the expression of different opinions and keeping participants away from exposing their opposing views at will (Conover et al., 2011; Brundidge, 2010). Following this line of thought leads us to the study of "flaming". Its ubiquity in the online communication world makes it one of the major clues researchers can follow to explore the essence of online communicative interaction (Lee, 2005). In early studies of flaming, it was defined as very noticeable hostile expressions, such as cursing and insults, and studied as a negative effect of the online setting, certain characteristics of which were seen to be responsible for such hostile online communications, including anonymity (Suler, 2004; Kiesler et al., 1984; Cho and Kwon, 2015), a lack of social cues and normative context (Spears and Lea, 1992; Foster 1997; Gimenez 1997), and low social presence (Siegel et al., 1986; Walther, 1996; Sproull and Kiesler, 1991). As such, for most empirical studies related to computer-mediated communications especially, flaming has received attention for its unwelcome, but very common existence in the online public sphere (for example, Kayany 1998; Lea et al. 1992; Tabbi, 1997; Smith and Osborne, 1997), and for a series of negative effects resulting from it, such as participation inhibition (Alonzo and Aiken, 2004; Christopherson, 2007), negative emotional effects and anti-normal behaviours (Johnson et al., 2009; Coyne et al., 2011), the sabotage of online discussion culture (Lea et al., 1992; Moor et al., 2010), and reducing the legitimacy of opposing point of views (Mutz, 2007).

A turning point has arrived, however, as the focus of flame research is creeping away from the CMC environment, to individual communication, and even to the content of communication itself. For example, more and more evidence has been found in empirical studies to show that deindividuation, which results from characteristics of online communicative settings, such as

anonymity and lack of social cues, is not necessarily the cause of online inhibition such as flaming anymore (for example, Coleman et al., 1999; Postmes et al., 2001). Instead, flaming is considered to result from a certain context generated by a certain group of individuals as an effect of a collectively perceived norm (Lea et al., 2001). In that sense, flaming can be also considered normative behaviour in certain online communication groups, as long as it is among the perceived norms conformed to by in-group members in general (see more of this point in Postmes et al., 2000). Flaming can even be recognized as beyond moral categorization, considered to be not so "flaming" for those in-group members who perceive their behaviour to be normal, for example[9]. To further argue this point, the centre of debate has shifted from the communicative context to the definition and methodology of flaming, asking exactly what can be defined and studied as flaming. Plenty of recent literature has suggested different categorizations and measures of standards of flaming (for example, Kaufer 2000; Turnage, 2007; O'Sullivan and Flanagin, 2003).

As a result, the standpoint of flame-studies has tended to be more and more neutral. As Jane (2015) noticed, definitions of flaming are so diverse that brings huge obstacles and complexity. There is no common agreement to what flaming is, not even a broad idea. Instead, its existence begins to be normalised (Jane, 2015), raising the question of whether flaming is real or just a big misunderstanding (Kruger et al., 2005; Thompsen, 1994; McKee, 2002). Flaming, therefore, is considered to be closely related to agents, namely the message sender and receiver, their current emotional and cognitive status, and the rhetorical meaning of the messages (Lange, 2005; O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003). However, online communication, which is a form of communication short of non-verbal clues, task-oriented, and non-concurrent, has increased ambiguity and misunderstanding between people (Derks et al., 2008; Kato and Akahori, 2004). This usually adds more negative feelings, emotions and misunderstanding to positive opinion information, but not the other way around (for example, Kato et al., 2007; Thompsen, 1994; McKee, 2002). Starting from this point, flaming is not recognized just as a message representing emotion and feelings, but gets more attention for the content of the information, the intention sent by it as a verbal or behavioural interpretation (for example, Milne, 2010). Thus, it is discussed rather as a form of antagonism, a way of expressing opposing attitudes

[9] According to Lea and Spears (1991), the key to influencing individual behaviour is not really the surroundings per se, but how and what people can perceive from it. The theory suggests that the behavioural difference between online and offline is not an attribute of different communicative settings. More important is that the online setting creates a collective perception more easily, which encourages individual participants to comply with the group norms.

and opinions (Thompsen and Foulger, 1996; Coleman, 2012; McCosker, 2014), with "bad taste" (Lea et al., 1992).

On this basis, the influence of flaming online is not only discussed as a side effect, but like many other online phenomena that have two sides, is considered more dialectically (for example the online disinhibition effect in Suler, 2004). For example, after four months lurking in an online discussion group, Vrooman (2002) admitted that flaming is an inevitable form of performance and display produced by the diversity of the online informative environment. In essence, however, it contributes to forming and understanding group identity and culture through communication. If we therefore understand flaming as beyond rhetoric and moral categorization, but as about playfulness and in-group culture, it is not completely all about hate and hostility. As Kuntsman (2007) commented, playfulness and harmfulness are two inseparable parts of an online flame. This means, as flaming is creating "destructive communication", it may simultaneously contain quite educative content and intent (McKee, 2002). Some scholars shared the same thought and considered, despite the negative form of expression, that flaming might have a positive purpose, for example the promotion of true expression (Hyde, 2010). Some researchers thus argue (for example Milne, 2010), that we should take the ground of being an outsider in flaming research, and allow some space for exploring the possibility that flaming has productive and creative functions in group communication and individual identity formation.

Therefore, homophily and antagonism commonly exist in online communication as typical information phenomena (see Stroud, 2010; Nahon and Hemsley, 2014; Williams et al., 2015; Woo-young and Park, 2012). By studying this, we come across some controversial characteristics of online deliberation, involving the process of forming online opinions, their influence in shaping the online communicative pattern, and the further consequences and effects they have on political discourse, by considering of different political, social and cultural context. Some studies, (for instance Mutz, 2006), have found that, expressing oneself in an environment of competing opinions can help create a high level of openness among individual participants, and tolerance of different and opposing views, but significantly decrease political engagement overall. On the other side, however, avoiding or giving up communication with those who hold opposing views is argued to be the reason for more partial engagement (Lawrence et al., 2010). Deli and Keeter (1996) and Prior (2007) also found that people who pay more attention to opposing views are more well informed politically than those who do not,

and that this motivates them to engage more in political discussions. Furthermore, according to Lawrence et al.'s (2010) study, even though information search and access is greatly promoted by the internet, and online communication seems to offer a lot of promise for information-learning and opinion-improvement, few people have actually benefited, and there are in fact fewer opportunities for opinion transformation. Sharing the same concern, Sunstein (2001) further argued that online communication consists of many online spaces in which like-minded people gather. Opinion exchange in such environments will create more extreme and radical opinions than an individual on their own (Sunstein, 2001). However, findings from other research shows that this can evolve into a learning process involving information-learning, self-reflection, and opinion transformation (for example Stromer-Galley, 2003) and it has been argued that only prejudiced homophily leads to radical antagonism (Sunstein, 2012). In unprejudiced homogeneous environments, on the other side, individuals are more likely to comply with healthy behaviours (Centola, 2011), therefore reducing polarization (Dandekar et al., 2013).

Although it is still too early to see the full potential of online deliberation, we can learn from all these divergent findings in recent online communication research, which offer a good opportunity to investigate and acquire a deeper understanding of online communication, and online communicative society as deliberation. As Lev-On and Manin (2009) pointed out, it depends whether the predominant driving factor operating in certain situations and periods is homophily or antagonism. It depends on the process of homogenizing and polarizing information to different extents as the result of the interplay between multiple different groups, through various actors who have also been influenced in return by the connections and contexts they form with each other. As Benkler (2006) saw it, normal economies of attention suggest that we should expect people to prioritise homophonous interaction with like-minded others, but the dynamics of the internal discussions behind appearance of segregation are what matters. Methodologically, this requires a more detailed understanding of such dynamics at three levels: 1) At a more micro- level (for example in studying individual behaviours in online communication to see how interaction happening on the individual level plays a role in opinion formation); 2) At a macro- level (for example in studies of general online networks, more work needs to be done on understanding the interactive patterns between groups with different opinions; 3) Evaluating to what extent such interactive patterns contribute to online homophily and polarization by considering other possible relevant factors in different political, social and cultural contexts.

2.4.3. Dialogic features and communicative behaviours for understanding deliberation morally

With deliberative theory focusing more and more attention on communication in its daily dimensions, shifting the focus onto the goal-free and persuasion-free style of everyday communicative actions (Stewart et al., 2004), and the intersubjective relations between participants in everyday life (Lipari, 2004), the role played by deliberation is understood as more than simple information exchange for opinion formation and transition. This points to the process whereby people meet to change and be changed as a human being - namely recognizing and developing themselves through the communicative action of the dialogic process (Habermas, 1984; Cissna and Anderson, 1994). Such a change in theoretical point of view makes the communicative attributes of participants as human beings more and more important in recognizing and understanding deliberation at the level of morality, by considering the logical connection between individuals, and between the individual and the context they are in.

Meanwhile, it has been realized that the morality discussed in normative deliberation model is very ideal. For example, as Galston (1994) suggested, citizens should learn how to restrain their self-desire and self-longing to reach a final common goal in a group. Similarly, Gutmann and Thompson (2002) discussed the core principles of reciprocity in the deliberative model, pointing out that the essence of reciprocity is incorporative, meaning participants should represent themselves by considering what justice requires in the ongoing process, giving reasons acceptable not for themselves, but more importantly for others (Gutmann and Thompson, 2002). Also, the stance of being reasonable, as Mendelberg (2002) points out, requires other participants to be infected with emotion as well. That is to say, no matter for what reason (an act of empathy for example), you must be considerate of others, aware of commonalities and differences, and put yourself in the position of the other. All those reflections show that, even though deliberative views are trying to create a balance by adding moral values different from the traditional liberal individualism culture, this is hard to achieve, and we have to admit that the moral competence of people in real democratic life is very diverse. In particular, as Lind (2016) put it, moral decisions/judgements are rarely right or wrong. In real life, for most of the time, we face the dilemma of having vague feelings that something is wrong, which we cannot even interpret (p. 27).

Based on this, therefore, recent empirical research tends to understand the moral meaning of deliberation by investigating and explaining the meaning represented in unconscious informal

association-building through interpersonal communication. Taking a phenomenological perspective, the traditional domain of moral behaviour is defined only on the basis of moral judgment, driven by explicit moral rules and duties (Narvaez and Lapsley, 2005), but little else. However, as Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1991) argued, moral principles are only the instruction ideally set up for those who are inexperienced, while in reality, more focus should lie on refining the moral response for educational purpose rather than defining morality with specific rules and principles. Furthermore, in daily moral life, it is more likely that most of our behaviours are determined by pre-consciousness and automatic cognitive process (Bargh, 1996; 1997; Bargh and Ferguson, 2000). If this is the case, there would be very little human behaviour and conduct that could be categorized as moral, no mention in deliberation being moral with each other. In that case, the emphasis of contemporary deliberative theory has moved away from "best reason" to the inner-subjective conditions of social reality (Escobar, 2009), the features of discourse and behaviours of people in such communicative relationships (Barge and Little, 2002; Rosenberg, 2007), used to understand the moral situation[10] in a more practical sense.

As such, the discussion can be developed in two dimensions. The first focuses on the moral qualities and behaviours that people have in deliberation, known as moral intuition[11]. By thinking of its formation, it is commonly accepted that most of our behaviours as human beings are guided by a cognitive system that features different degrees of automaticity (Narvaez and Lapsley, 2005; Hogarth, 2001; Keil and Wilson, 2000). Even though automatic thoughts and judgments could weigh differently in different automaticity models (see more on this point in Narvaez and Lapsley, 2005), they still play a key role in conscious processing, for presenting moral behaviour, especially, in terms of the dimensions of personality traits (for example Reznek, 1997; Levy and Bayne, 2004), a non-conscious way of being influenced by emotions (for example Bechara and Damasio, 2005; Valdesolo and Desteno, 2006), or to certain social influences (for example Rest, 1986; Damasio, 1994; Young and Koenigs, 2007; Zhong, 2011).

[10] The moral situation I mean here is the actual situation happening in our everyday life that we consistently use, even rely on our moral feelings to make decisions and judgments intuitively. It is described as "gut feeling" by Gigerenzer (2007). Also see more on this point in Lind (2016).

[11] Moral intuition, according to the definition of Haidt's (2001), means "…the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good–bad, like–dislike), without any awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence, or inferring a moral conclusion" (p. 818). It is argued that the sense of morality represented in everyday activities is the judgment made automatically and intuitively, involving mental process, but without the awareness of doing so (Bargh, 1999; Bargh and Chartrand, 1999).

Such automatic response[12] to information processing is considered as one of the ways we know and learn the world (Hogarth, 2001). In other words, we always learn knowledge that we cannot even explain well in words ourselves without being aware of it. That is to say, we pick up knowledge through daily phenomena, and consistently practice it by applying it to daily life (Frensch, 1998). As a result, for most of our decisions, there is evidence that we mostly rely on our intuitive knowledge without going through deliberative thought, even though we are convinced to act intentionally (Wegner and Wheatley, 1999; Hammond, 2000).

On the other dimension, a learning approach also applies to the understanding of moral conduct. As some studies point out, morality is educable or trainable, especially through practicing analytical deliberative thinking and skills (Musschenga, 2009; Hogarth, 2002; Narvaez and Lapsley, 2005). That is because, as Bargh (1989) pointed out, even though automaticity always contrasts with cognitive process, the line between them is rough. He described automaticity as a flexible cognitive state in the middle somewhere between intentionally controlling and conscious awareness, arguing that automatistic behaviour is not necessarily unintentional, or uncontrollable (Bargh, 1989). Therefore, in some studies, human cognitive functioning is understood as two systems working together in a "dual-process", in which the rational part and the intuitive part both play a role (Kahneman, 2011; Greene, 2007). Even though there is controversy about which is most important for characterizing moral behaviour[13], rational deliberation undeniably contributes to such processes. For instance, as moral behavior is closely related to emotion as intuitive response, people can learn how to control emotional stimulation and impulsion on the basis of past experience, for example, by further promoting the reflective effect of deliberative thinking in the forming process of moral behaviour (Pizarro and Bloom, 2003).

Methodologically, even though the empirical design is very limited, there are some approaches we can borrow to study such moral sense in daily deliberative life empirically. For example, Wilhelm (2000) designed four basic questions to start thinking about and investigating the moral situation in general: 1) To what extent do participants of an online political group solely

[12] In Levy and Bayne's (2004) work, they distinguished automatistic agency from the automatic agency. The former one is considered as the situation in which people act without fully conscious of what they are doing, while the later one means an absence of one, at least a reduction, of the experience of doing (p. 210).

[13] Some have argued that intuition is the major influencing factors in shaping human moral behaviour (for example Reynolds, 2006). In that case, deliberative thinking/reason is only the assistant of intuition, only getting involved as a reflection afterwards, or when natural intuition is absent (see more on this point in Haidt, 2001; 2012).

provide ideas and information rather searching for information from other group members? 2) To what extent do participants of an online political group exchange opinions by actually incorporating and responding to others' ideas? 3) To what extent is there homogeneity within a group? 4) And to what extent the discussion led by antagonism based on self-interest is not included in process of reasoning and judging? These four questions point to three areas for investigation: 1) interactivity between different groups; 2) in-group interactivity; 3) information-taking and -giving as reactions in an argumentative context, considering factors such as attitude, emotions, and the identity transformation between individuals and group members.

On a more individual level, as Galston suggested, we can approach the moral sense by investigating people's daily deliberative activity. Some related studies in political psychology can also help us with ideas for further understanding the moral intuition behind communicative behaviours and thoughts. Firstly, it is the behaviours and reactions people have when they are in a conflicting environment. For example, it has been found that people tend to believe opinions more compatible with their own (Sunstein, 2000). Especially in an argumentative environment, the human mind more tends to be individualist and competitive (Mendelberg, 2002). Once people have made up their minds, their deliberative behaviour, taking listening as an example, can only operate in the service of victory, to find the weakness of others' arguments, or to display their arguing skills, but not to build mutual understanding (Galston, 1994). Moreover, the discussion of morality can also relate to certain social and cultural influence, such as authority culture. As some studies show, the authoritarian personality will further weaken the moral value of deliberation, for example, through unwillingness to enter into public deliberation, or unwillingness to question an unexamined preference by listening fairly and expressing honestly (Galston,1994). Other mind-sets or emotional states, such as the motivation to power and achievement (Winter, 2003) or empathy (Galston, 1994), epistemic vigilance (Sperber et al., 2010), can all be used to interpret deliberative behaviours in respect of, for example, open-mindedness, consideration or mutual understanding (Reyknoski, 2006).

Chapter III. Methodology

3.1 Considering the general design: The symmetry principle

In this thesis, I considered applying the "symmetry approach" with online content analysis (posts and replies from online forums) and offline interview analysis, in order to balance out the phenomenon known as "platform bias". The "symmetry principle" here, which means to criticize, confirm, supplement, or develop the findings of online data through qualitative analysis of the interview data, is used to reach a conclusion by completing and balancing the findings from both approaches. The further design is determined by two major factors which have to be determined in advance: the research question and the research data. The research question of this study is: 'What can we understand about Chinese online society through deliberation?' By taking a perspective of deliberation, my approach to online society is to investigate the online participation phenomena and the participants in an online forum as one form of online deliberative practice. My aim is to find alternative interpretations of online deliberation by considering the political, social and cultural characteristics in a Chinese context, and understanding online Chinese society in the frame of deliberation. To perform this task, deliberation is set to be the research object. Deliberation here it is not meant in textual content, rather, I am more interested in possible communicative patterns, features, and the interactive frame formed through such a communication method. It is saying, besides words, the act of deliberation itself is more important, including deliberative thinking and behaviors behind the words, for example reasons, values and psychology.

Considering internet research in general, the exploration of methodologies concerning online data is accompanied with the cognitive process from the digital to the digitized[14]. As a widely accepted idea in the early stages of the internet, the online world was considered as a virtual realm, set apart from the real world. Later, some scholars, such as Steve Jones (1999) and Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000), argued that more attention should be paid to a series of new changes and influences brought by the internet to make online cultural practice more analysable in the social science field. At this point, the focus of internet research had shifted from viewing the online data as an isolated social object to the interaction the data has with

[14] Here, I refer to the process that social science researchers recognise the study materials to study online world, such as online phenomena, behaviours, actions can be represented as digital data. As a result, they explore new methodologies, using analytical technique and computer software for example, to collect and analyse the data.

both the online and the offline environments, enabling social scientists to treat the online world in a sense of society.

However, it firstly brings some new challenges for considering the methodology design for internet research in social science. With the internet more and more integrating itself into social, professional and public life, the social science field has been offered another resource and approach to further extend research into digital settings (Rieder, 2013). Since the late 1990s, social scientists have been encouraged to develop their empirical relevance with more abundant structured online data. With content analysis for example, online text created by certain platforms can be translated into data with all kinds of analytic values, such as behaviours (Turow 2012), preference (Turow 2006), controversies (Birkbak, 2013; Plantin, 2011). Although such a cultural research concept, which deals with the interaction between data and the related data-cultivating environment, has been extended in the virtual space, the key problem is that the involvement of the platform could cause the inconformity of research standpoint that to consider network platform as only part of context acting on the research object, or the context in which analysable data is created. Specifically, it caused ambiguity for targeting the empirical object in internet research (Marres and Moats, 2015). As Foot and Schneider (2004) noticed, some researchers reach their conclusions based on online phenomena, while others draw their conclusions from offline factors. We are in the confusion between identifying and understanding the platform as an endogenous and an exogamous factor to the object system.

As the same as other approaches, this updated platform-specific approach has advantages and disadvantages. As what some previous researches have done during online data analysis, they mostly preferred to adapt the standpoint of platform, which means engaging the data collection and analysis based on the functional design of the platform. For example, in Weber, et al.'s work (2013), they tried to understand political learning by analysing hashtags on Twitter. Borra, et al. (2014) studied the controversies of Wikipedia articles by targeting its specific format, the edit and the fork. One advantage is that it allows us to develop an understanding of the given application programming interfaces of the platform, which is convenient and easily-modelled, to discover the relevant performing findings to a topic. However, it also raises the issue of "platform bias" (Tufekci, 2014; Gerlitz, 2016), which can be described as the limitation caused in choosing the perspective of understanding online data by the existing online actions presented by application programming interfaces only. To question such an approach, Marres

and Moats (2015) pointed out, "While we may set out to do social research with social media, we may easily end up studying platform-specific dynamics, and the other way around" (P.5). Also, it could over-specify the research problem, especially for more open-ended ones with specific measures (Marres, 2015). To address this problem, some scholars suggest editing the data based on the consideration of certain platform design, online users and online culture, for reducing "platform bias" artificially (for example Roger, 2013). However, comes with the risk that the research could be largely limited by the representativeness of the sample (Granello and Wheaton, 2004), meaning the findings could be misled or damaged, for example by selecting the data sample out of some subjective biased consideration of the social media platform settings (Gerlitz, 2016; Marres and Moats, 2015; boyd and Crawford, 2012).

As a contribution to the debate, a "symmetry principle" is suggested for the social studies on online media technologies. This symmetry approach, taking the example of the controversy analysis in Marres and Moats's (2015) study, attempts to balance the attention of the research lying between the issue-specific intervention and the media platform-specific behaviors by introducing a more positive acknowledgement of the effect of digital platform to online participation both successful and failing. That is to say, for one thing, researchers can select online data using an issue-specific perspective, artificially eliminating those unrelated to the research topic with personal experience and understanding. This would be a good approach for cases where a researcher can clearly distinguish the boundary between related and unrelated data. However, for more complicated cases, instead of assuming the "given" positive or negative effect of the platform, researchers can also take a platform-specific perspective, engaging online data collection and analysis by considering the functional designs of the platform. For the last and also the most important step, researchers apply this symmetrical treatment to "balance" the findings through both approaches, making them collaborate with each other by "taking advantage of productive confusions between [them]" (Marres and Moats, 2015: 13).

Therefore, by deviating from this design method, the difficulty of the study was mainly in the data collection phase. In general, we have two options: using generated or naturally occurring data (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), that is, in this case, the posts and replies messages already existing in online forum. I could consider generating data mainly based on the functional and application design of the platform. Considering this study, however, the complexity comes from many aspects. First, there are so many influencing factors in this process, such as the

media, the government, social elites, and opinion leaders. It would be hard to identify and control all these characters during the communicative process. Moreover, there would be some uncontrollable factors, for example the size of the audience, the timeline, the structure of the deliberation and the context. The process and result could be affected by any of the above factors with artificial intervention. More importantly, to consider such online deliberation as the daily communicative activities of Chinese people, I do not want such deliberation to occur with predefined concepts. Instead, it should be original, and the participants should be guided by their own thoughts, knowledge and experience. In that case, when the research involves multiple elements that could not be controlled by any one individual, and is so complex that using participants may not achieve data suitable for meeting the research agenda, naturally occurring data is preferable, and is likely to have greater value for researchers (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

However, analyzing the naturally occurring data likely highlights the dilemma involving the platform-specific standpoint for research, namely the question of what exactly are we studying, the online deliberation, or the deliberative platform? Also, it means the data analysis process is inevitably influenced by "platform bias". To limit this negative influence, for one, the methodology in this study is not entirely built on quantitative analysis. Certainly, quantitative analysis is valued as a highly efficient approach for processing a huge amount of data online. Especially for analyzing textual materials, with content analysis for example, it is considered as objective enough to use many types of analysis software to identify themes and patterns through text data. Moreover, when considering the internet, digital analysis is so widely preferred as part of the success driving the development of social science through the adoption of quantitative technologies. Therefore, one may argue that if unmixed qualitative analysis still exists in this evolution of social science when numbers and data become the main research resource and materials in the virtual world.

Data analysis can still be addressed using a qualitative approach. According to Dey (1993), the basic core of qualitative data analysis is in the type of data produced for the research aim and the way they are analyzed for answering the research question. For qualitative analysis, the emphasis lies on the meaning of data through conceptualization, while the quantitative approach deals with it through the use of statistics. In fact, part of the essence of the "platform bias" issue refers to uncritical conventionalization of the study object. The meaning of the data has been simplified through identifying a set of numerical indices, calculations and

measurements, but they themselves are also the products of concepts (Sayer, 1992). By applying a qualitative approach to online data, I have therefore only treated online forums as data resource platforms. This is, however, not the only context set aimed to be explained by numbers. Instead, I process the data through qualitative analysis which allows researchers to break the limit of the platform by setting the context of the analysis to a wider social environment in which the internet plays a part. It allows me to re-connect the theory, using a social perspective for discovering all possible connections with factors endogenous and exogenous to the deliberation web.

However, one may still argue that the occurring data can still be affected by the platform design. To conquer this problem, I firstly considered applying the "symmetry principle" in online data selection. To be specific, I have two data collections by applying both the deliberation-specific and the platform-specific perspectives. With the platform-specific method, I collected all the hot topics intensely discussed during the target study period, except with one supporting-opinion-overwhelming case which should not be included with deliberation-specific perspective. This case makes significant changes to the structure of the whole data sample. Instead of simply ruling it out, I have analyzed both data collections, and made a comparison between the two results to draw conclusions from. This provides a contribution to extend deliberative theory into the online communicative settings field as a new deliberative practice.

Besides, one could also argue that the occurring data could be limitedly collected by the platform design. Indeed, in this case they are only based on textual posts and replies, which may neglect the deliberative behaviors and meanings reflected in the non-textual participation, and affect the findings with "platform bias". For that reason, I considered adding another section of analysis by approaching the participants through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Participants are expected to talk their online deliberative experience, thoughts and feelings semi-guided by interview questions designed out of consideration of online forum kind of communicative settings. By doing that, I have considered online settings as one of the contextual elements for data collection. Meanwhile, the semi-structure of the interview enabled me to discover more hidden data information also created under the online forum settings but cannot be identified in the form of textual messages, such as the deliberative thought behind actions of sharing, liking, clicking and viewing. Likewise, semi-structured interview, which is characterized as "open-ended" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006: 118), can approach "in-depth fact" through surface appearance by searching for more details (Wengraf, 2001). That

also means data collection based on interviews can be also addressed beyond the structure of platform. Also, through the qualitative approach, data analysis can be set in a more extensive analytical context involving political, social and cultural features concerned when talking about communication in a Chinese context, rather being limited within the online forum settings. Therefore, I use the "symmetry principle" also for combining and completing the findings from the online forum analysis and the interviews, to come to the final conclusion. In the following sections, I will address the method design more in details.

3.2 Data collection: Identifying the existing data source

3.2.1 The case study

For this study, I take the Wenchuan Earthquake that occured in China in 2008 as the case study. First, it is one of the main events occurring at the very start and mostly active period in the history of online communication for Chinese people. In this study, we identify online deliberation as an informal and spontaneous online activity happening in the everyday communicative life of ordinary people. In that sense, the Wenchuan Earthquake was a huge instigator of online communicative activities nationwide. The earthquake, as well as the many related topics discussed during the earthquake grabbed much global attention and had a significant impact on the development of certain topical events. The type of online deliberation that occurred during the Wenchan Earthquake was known as a “communication storm” in China at the time. Especially at the outset, informal online communication was even more prominent than offerings from official media, directing the attention of both the public and the government (Zhang, 2009). As a major information resource, communication via all kinds of social media was described as “the shadow follows the form” for its convenience. It was impromptu in nature and was a popular way for people to access information and participate in public affairs (Jiang, 2008).

Secondly, considering all kinds of deliberation forms online, online deliberation is defined as the communicative activities mainly in an online forum. The online forum is the major and most popular online communicative platform at the time before and after the Wenchan Earthquake happened. The public paid close attention to the earthquake, which makes the online forum one of the most important intermediaries. For example, the issue of emergency supplies was one of the hottest topics, and talked about on every major forum and portal in China. Everybody, from earthquake survivors to volunteers, journalists and rescuers, became an information resource, posting messages, news, pictures and videos through online forums (Peng, 2008). The first news of the earthquake came from Baidu Post Bar (IP: 61.161.76.) only

6 minutes after the earthquake began (Min, 2008), and within 15 minutes discussion had spread all over China from the northernmost parts in Beijing, to Hainan in the south (Yan, 2008). Right up to that point, however, the official Chinese media, such as Sina, had not reported news of the earthquake. At 14:46, Xinhua Net first released a news item titled "MS7.8 Earthquake hit Sichuan Wenchuan, MS3.9 Earthquake hit Beijing Tongzhou" (Xinhua News Agency, 2008), 11 minutes after it appeared on the online forum. Most people, when they recall this event, say that they heard the news first from an online forum instead of from official media (Min, 2008). This reason provides us with a good case for us studying the online deliberation through the platform of online forums.

Third, for the case study of public deliberation in the Chinese context, I wanted to choose a more "uninterrupted" case, which is not subject to as much intervention, or interrupted by external factors, and can be treated as the daily communicative actions of ordinary Chinese people. To identify "normal" in that sense could be very tricky considering it in Chinese context. As the most significant debate among students of deliberation studies is whether the party-state political system or an authoritarian political environment might offer strong resistance that would constrain online communicative activities, and effectively limit or prohibit democratic deliberation (for example Boas, 2006; Lim, 2009; He, 2006). However, it also means that the government involvement can be key in setting the tone for public participation like this. For that reason, I want this deliberation case to be a natural one, in the normal Chinese information environment where the state still has significant control over the flow of information, but tries to coexist with the discourse power of this new digital generation (He, 2006). In that case, studying online deliberation should take account of the party-state political system as an indispensable and clearly linked condition of studying public deliberation within an online forum. But it is not the focus. In other words, the interest is in the practice of online deliberation in a Chinese context, but not the Chinese context per se.

Therefore, the Wenchuan Earthquake is a preferred case, because it is not a single-topic-related deliberation, rather an event representing a period of communicative life. Comparing it to single-topic-related deliberation, for example some specific cases could only attract specific groups of people engaging in deliberation, or be censored for some reason to make a special case, this communicative period can be used to better present the online communicative activities of ordinary Chinese people in a term of society for topics covering a larger range of subject areas, attracting all areas of society. Studying this case enables us to freeze some of the

complexity that arises at the institutional/governmental level, allowing us to focus on the practice of deliberation as a perspective to approach to the understanding of Chinese online society.

3.2.2 The online forum

This study mainly uses posts and replies from an online forum as existing research data for studying online deliberation. The online posts were collected from one of the biggest online forums in China: Tianya Forum. We chose this forum from the top four online forums in China. These are Baidu post bar (BPB), Tianya, Qiangguo and Kaidi. BPB is well known in mainland China for being easy to use. According to the statistics, at the end of 2012, the BPB had 600 million registered users and over four million post bars owned by 3000,000 Banzhu (the operator of the post bar) (Zhang, 2016). However, the posts in BPB are generally highly recreational. The style of the forum usually tends towards egao[15] or a strong fan following, which makes it a very popular gathering place mainly for the younger generation in China. As a result, BPB is not considered suitable for serious public online deliberation.

Secondly, the Qiangguo forum is one of the most influential online spaces for public opinions. It is the first political bulletin board system (BBS) going with online news has attached to the news website people.com.cn. Qiangguo Forum shares some features with other online forums, such as interactivity, immediacy and subjectivity. But the forum is owned by People's Daily Online (an official newspaper of the CPC), and is the predecessor of online edition of the People Daily which provides direct information on the politics and viewpoint of the Chinese government. For a long time, the People's Daily was one of a few information resources used by the Chinese government to show the world what they were doing and planning to do. Most articles are devoted to political figures or ideas predicted official attitudes or subjects coming up. Qiangguo is therefore always considered to be a "mainstream" public opinion space greatly influenced by official Chinese opinion (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2010). The sources of information used by the posts there are generally drawn from China's mainstream media, such as the People's Daily, or Nanfang Daily. It is considered to be the main media of exchange between the government and the people. For that reason, it is not a very autonomous online space for the creation of public deliberation.

[15] Egao: a Chinese word with a special meaning. Guo and Yang, (2010) described it as a form of parody with a level of inevitable comic and satiric effects, to create various polemical relationships with the texts and/or matters they satirize (pp. 4-5).

Another popular online forum in China, Kaidi Forum, is a subsidiary of Nanfang Daily. Kaidi has 6 million registered users and usually about 100000 online clients at a time (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2010). The forum community of Maoyan kanren (Cat's Eye) is second on the list of the most popular forums with the largest number of initial posts and replies (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2010). However, this forum is known for its "senior" client base. Most active online participants there are middle-aged, or older. Some out of date ideas are still taken as "truth" in Kaidi. The discursive style of the forum, which is full of conservative apathy and paranoid doctrine, has become more and more insulated from the overall online population, and is especially criticized by the younger generation online. For this reason, deliberation practice on Kaidi is not a good example of the general online deliberation situation in China.

In the end, we chose the Tianya forum for this study. This is also among the biggest and most popular online forums in China. It is considered to be the most influential online forum in China for diverse opinion, especially before the rise of Weibo (a Chinese microblog) (Lei and Zhou, 2016). With more than 100 million registered users, it has 23 sub-forums at national level, 54 sub-forums at provincial level, and 145 sub-forums at city level (Tianya Club, 2015). According to the statistics, among the total registered users 56% are male and 44% are female, which is approximately the same as the gender structure of Chinese online society (Huang, 2014). Also, in terms of education, regional distribution and age, Tianya register users cover all levels of Chinese society (Huang, 2014), thus representing an 'ideal' model of the general situation in online society in China. Furthermore, compared to the other BBS in China, the Tianya Forum is a place that attracts more critical opinion, and known as a site of "counterrevolutionary" ideas, and as a "weather vane" of public opinion, in a way that is accessible for most Chinese online participants. Given all that, the Tianya forum was much the best choice as a source of existing data for the study of public deliberation online.

3.3 Data selection

3.3.1 The existing data selection: online posts and replies

In this study, I choose to manually 'scrape' the online data. As one of the common techniques, scraping is considered as an efficient method for data collection, to extract "structured information" from sources, making data more suitable for analysis and better organised. Unexceptionally for this study, extracting data from the internet where as the resource has been featured as information overloaded and questioned by the data quantities is always considered as an opportunity and a challenge (Moens, 2006). As much of a quantitative task as it is,

scraping usually works through devices or software (google scraper for example) with a scraper code programmed based on keywords, special fields or data elements. The advantages are, firstly it can efficiently process data from multiple resources (social media such as Facebook and Twitter for example), especially related to some "real-time" form of data generation such as blogging. Therefore, when the target content is dispersive and wide-ranged, the researchers do not have specific scope for data analysis, or sometimes "real-time analysis" (Berry, 2011b). It is a preferred approach. Secondly, the way scraping treats data is comparatively objective. Compared to the methods addressing "cleaning" research data from the "dirty", "messy" and "incomplete" online data pool, scraping considers the online information resources as heterogeneous, and the aim is to extract structured information from it. In that sense, the quality of the data depends on the data-processing, namely the operations of the data device and the researchers, but not the data per se. Therefore, with the concept of scraping, the hot spot could be easier shifted away from collecting and extracting data from the online dirty pool, since it is not the problem faced by social science research only. Instead, it is widely thought that social science should borrow some relevant experience and method ideas, inducting and re-organizing the online digital practices, in order to transform them into useable research materials for social studies.

Therefore, by considering the concept of scraping data but not the exact method, the research data has been extracted manually in this study for several considerations. First of all, the research planned to detect those comparatively heated discussions during the time of the Wenchan Earthquake. In other words, the research data was not only generated by keywords or specific data elements' extraction. One could argue that "Wenchuan earthquake" could be the key word. It is rather a period of an event than only a keyword. Namely, this study collected all the related topics arisen in the period of the earthquake; for example, those relating to the economy, politics, society, culture, education, national security, and public health care. In fact, scraping is a much more preferred method for extracting content with emergent information structures, for example tables or tweets. It is still arguable, to a degree, that if scraping is the most suitable approach for information extraction from information sources comparatively loose in structure (for example websites or news comment pages) since it could treat the content blindly, formatting it with certain scrapers as the only standard may not properly be the best analytical technique (Marres and Weltevrede, 2013). Therefore, using scraping by only extracting content with keyword extraction or specific data elements could be tricky and inaccurate for this study. For example, some posts including keyword "Wenchuan Earthquake"

could not relate to the topic widely discussed during the earthquake time, or earthquake-related topic at all. On the other hand, some posts, especially replies have no significant signature detected with keyword "Wenchuan Earthquake" could be highly correlated content to the earthquake. Manual recognition can ensure more proper data selection result in this case.

Secondly, the data range can be specified more in this study, and the comparatively regular structure of the data display also create conditions suitable for manual selection. To begin with, the study planned to focus on the online deliberation in certain period after the earthquake happened, rather than all the time since. Even though I cannot assume that the earthquake-related topics only appeared during certain period after the earthquake, as a significant event, it is quite likely that the heat of such topics as focal points talked by the public online will eventually subside. For a case study of public deliberation, targeting the active period of the public event is preferred, and has more value for academic research. Meanwhile, the online data is not from all online forums in China, but only chosen from one specific one: Tianya. Considering a specific event, period of time and data source further narrowed down the data range.

Also, the structure of data display in online forums also, to an extent, simplifies the process of data selection for this study. For the same themed post, the same as on some news discussion boards, online forums allow participants to like and comment certain messages and posts. Otherwise, it also enables participants to like and respond to any comments to the themed post. However, such emerging structure of the sub-dialogue does not interrupt the main themed-post-branch-replied structure. All comments and replies, no matter if they are the primary, secondary or tertiary, are counted as replies below to the themed post. The number of clicks and replies are the most important indicators for themed posted to be ranked. Besides, the platform also allows users to share. For example, users can share the information from somewhere else to the online forum as a themed post, or the other way around. For studying deliberation in this online forum, I only counted the former share as a simple themed post, which does not create an emerging structure. And such sharing between different platforms usually is more satisfactory than within the same online forum, because for most sharers, it is not really necessary to start another discussion of the same topic if they could simply stay in the existing one, expressing opinions or reading opinions from the others. As I have learned from the online posts and replies, themed post sharing is rare in this online forum. Another share within the forum is the so called 'spam-post'. It refers to those same posts or

comments/replies used in an attention seeking or disturbing manner repeatedly in large amounts, having little real value. Such posts can be considered as sharing a post in theory, but it is no different to other replies and comments in form. So, in general, the main structure of online forums is comparatively simple. They mainly including one themed post and all the branch comments and replies down below. As a result, thinking from the platform perspective, the themed posts are expected to be in consistence, to some extent, with all their branch comments and replies in content. It is, to say, the data selection for content can mainly focus on the themed posts, which can greatly reduce the workload, making manual selection possible.

Importantly, also as a data analysis process, manual data selection enables researchers have a close relationship with the target data. Not only a data extraction method, scraping is also achieved as an analysis practice, since the way it works on data extraction is through the analysis of a structuring process (Marres and Weltevrede, 2013). It is to say, at the moment data is scraped, it has been also analyzed with the mannerisms of the particular researcher in question or the data analytic device dealing with relevant information, understanding and knowledge. However, this could lead to confusion in digital social studies, which is whether we are studying the online platform through the data, or we are considering the platform for data study. For scraping, it could be a more obvious question, because, as an analytical process, it gives the target data meanings with the sorts of format based on the online platforms and the content information generated from them. In that sense, the way people format the data could set up limits on social research, leading platform-dependent results (boyd & Crawford 2011). To settle such a controversy, however, the fluidity of the distinction between the object and the method is friendly recognized, especially as an understanding of methodology. As Marres and Weltevrede (2013) have discussed in their study, they think the reason that allows scraping to work adaptably for social research is that it is an indivisible entity of data collection/extraction and data analysis. Precisely because of the indivisibility between the instruments, methods and the method, by thinking of scraping, some social research experience, concepts and methods can also be incorporated into the method design for data extraction in order to promote the analytic capabilities of online data for social research.

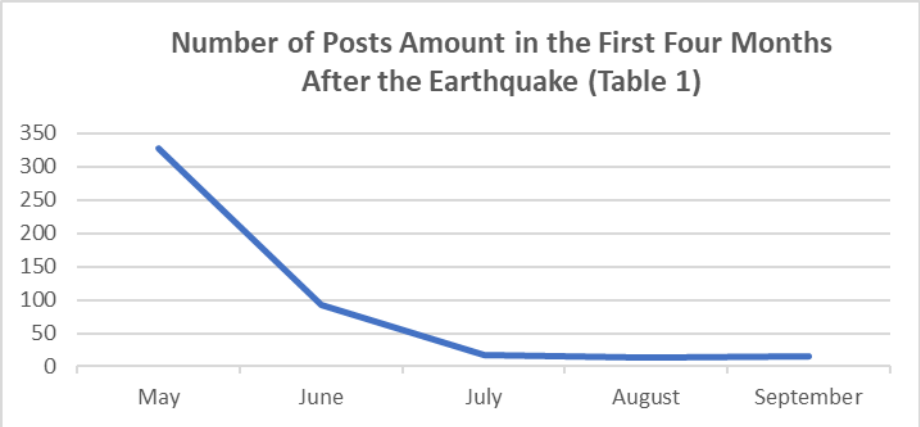
Being inspired by this, I found that process of mutually scraping the online data can offer one perspective learned from the general data information and structure, to handle the data with a more social approach, namely the deliberation experience, concepts and theory. Speaking from a methodological perspective, one of the biggest challenges internet research has for social

research is, for one, how to transform online digital data into elements such as behaviors, thoughts and phenomena that can be studied as a new extension area for social and cultural research (Rogers, 2009); for another, how to give the online data more social meaning, namely introducing analytical methods, ideas and theories in social science into the design of quantitative analysis (Marres and Weltevrede， 2013). By following the suggestion of discussing scraping as a data extraction and also an analytical method, I learned that to manually approach the potential data does not only offer a chance for researchers to combine the data extraction method design with their own understanding of related ideas, knowledge and theory understandings of social studies, but also allow them to find and be inspired by more possible relevant data "realities" revealed in such processing processes. Especially for taking the context into account, manually approaching the data has cultivated me the sense to pick up correlative social and cultural elements, both expected and unexpected[16], to contribute the later data analysis.

To be specific, The online posts and replies were firstly collected by a keyword search for "汶川地震" (Wenchan Earthquake). I firstly ruled out the posts non-cantered to the earthquake, and also only targeted the messages posted in the first four months after the earthquake, meaning from 12th May 2008 to 12th September 2008. As can be seen in Table 1 below, the first two months were the most active period for people posting online. After July, the number of posts decreased dramatically and remained at a low level thereafter. Therefore, I decided the active period of studying Wenchan Earthquake is the first two months after the earthquake happened. By far, 437 topic posts were detected in all. Here, I have applied the perspective of the deliberation study to select the data by also analyzing it. According to deliberative theory, the way people treat different opinion information can largely contribute the information environment, and it in return can greatly influence the opinion forming process of people who are in such information context (Gutmman and Thompson, 2000; Barabas， 2004; Habermas, 1996; Kim, et al., 1999; Dahlgren, 2005, 2009; Dahlberg, 2001). Deliberation, which is basically in a form of interaction of different opinions, produces consensus and divergence as

[16] As one of the major research goals, this study attempts to seek a more contextual understanding of online deliberation as a phenomenon by studying the online deliberative behaviors and thoughts of the participants. That means to set up a local Chinese political, social and cultural context is essential. By reading all necessary online materials, I could sense what political, social and cultural elements can contribute to such understanding through the language, expression and tones. By understanding such online deliberation as one kind of communication, getting close to the online data has helped me reflect on the background and values of Chinese communicative society as a Chinese, identifying a frame consisting of face culture, Guanxi, Chinese modesty, harmony culture and authority culture.

two polarized results, and any outcomes in between, which consequently arises the discussions of deliberative theory about how people treat divergence, seek for common ground on both the cognitive and moral levels. Therefore, by considering the discussion of deliberative theory, I further ruled out topics with less scope for discussion. For example, topics were mainly for published information, such as disaster reports and news, for information of missing people and property lost, to make sure the topics are those more opinion-directed and communicable. Eventually, I had 275 topic posts and 180510 related replies as the target data for the study.



To further target those more heated discussions than other less important ones, the data was artificially "structured". By going through all the topic posts, I got a general idea of four types of post based on a count of views and replies. They were: topic posts with a large number of both views and replies (LV-LR); topic posts with a large number of views but a relatively small number of replies (LV-SR); topic posts with a small number of views but a relatively large number of relies (SV-LR); and topic posts with a small number of both views and replies (SV-SR). An ideal attention-grabbing topic would be a topic post which had been heavily clicked and viewed, and followed by a good number of replies: namely LV-LR.

However, there is reason to believe that topic posts just heavily clicked or just highly commented-upon also count as popular topics. In an online setting, viewing and expressing, either in a text-based or a non-text-based form, can function separately in the deliberative process. They present different and independent online deliberative activities but can each impact on different aspects of deliberation. For example, participants could click and view online messages about a topic they are interested in, consolidating all the information in their minds, to help them form or improve their own opinion without "saying" anything. In other words, even though people do not always get their opinions expressed online, they can still be

considered to participate by way of reading others' posts, which directs them towards learning and self-reflection, influenced by other people's opinions. The difference is that people may not want to put their thoughts into words, expressing them online to show they have engaged in thinking and self-reflection, or that they have been engaged in a different way. For example, people may offer some related information without taking a standpoint; or just 'like' and share a post, or do nothing except clicking and viewing. This does not mean that they are not part of an online deliberation, or that they are not influenced by the deliberative process. In this sense, to only consider views or replies in an online setting would be one-sided. Both text-based and non-text-based deliberative behaviours, should both be taken into account as significant influencers for a comprehensive view of the online situation. In the second round of selection, therefore, I only meant to rule out those topic posts that had a relatively low number of clicks and replies.

The key to this is that I needed a "scraper" by which to define "popularity" with the count of views and replies. To do this, I considered the normalization method of min-max. Min-max normalization is a process of taking data, and transforming it to a value between 0 and 1. The minimum value is set at 0 and the maximum at 1. This provides an easy way to compare values that are measured using different scales. In this case, the largest number of views is 52801 and the largest number of replies 566. These are the maximum references. So, every post can have a view ratio of less than 1, by having its view count divided by 52801. Likewise, I can create the reply ratio of each topic post, which will also be less than 1, by dividing its number of views by 566. I also assigned equal weighting to the views and replies, meaning that they contribute equally to making a topic post attract attention through online deliberation. Then, I multiplied the click ratio and the reply ratio by the same weighting coefficients (50%), and added them together to produce a value between 0 and 1 for each topic post, which I called the attention value. There is an example of the attention value calculation below. The post I used had 45092 clicks and 269 replies, and its attention value was calculated as:

$$45092/52801*50\% +269/566*50\% = 0.6646.$$

After I had calculated the attention value for each topic post, I selected online messages with a median value 0.0338 (or above), because I wanted to focus more on attention-grabbing posts than on the rest. To finally have all the online messages ready to analyse, I also went through all the replies under each themed post, selecting by the content to rule out those meaninglessly repeats that watered down the topic, to make sure all the online messages selected are

appropriately meaningful for the research. I ended up with 138 topic posts from the Tianya forum with 138068 replies (including the one with the median value).

3.3.2 The generated data: Interview design and identifying participants

3.3.2.1 Interview design

In this study, in-depth semi-structured interviews were chosen for generating supplementary data on deliberative thinking that supported the existing online posts and replies. Inspired by discourse analysis, we assume that language is generated within certain contexts. There are always connections between what we say and what we do (action), to what we are (identity) (Gee, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to understand language by putting it back into the context in which it is produced, assessing it through the different discursive settings of the speakers. In this study, although we had some ideas about our analysis, we also wondered whether there was more information about deliberative thinking that we needed to dig out. For those reasons, instead of setting about our interviews with predefined concepts, we were curious to discover the original, non-interrupted, native experience of the online-interlocutors as they paraphrased them in their own words, ideas and thoughts. We wanted to be nonjudgmental, and just to focus on understanding the meaning in their words. In that sense, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were preferable. This is the kind of interview chosen for collecting detailed information from individual experience related to thoughts and behaviours on certain topics (Boyce and Neale, 2006). It is semi-structured and directed, which means that although it involves prepared questions, the interview does not usually follow the question list strictly, but rather takes on a conversational pattern (Qu and Dumay, 2011; Fylan, 2005). In this way, researchers are able to explore more through the use of some open-ended questions, and by allowing themselves to be inspired and diverted by the stories told by different participants (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006). It is also in-depth, which means the data generated can dig out unexpected "in-depth facts" that underlie surface appearances (Wengraf, 2001: 6).

However, this is not to say that this kind of conversational interview lacks structure, or that the researcher should not intervene in the talk in any sense. On the contrary, researchers are still required to direct the conversation by preparing interview questions to make sure they are able to cover all the main points necessary for the purpose of the study (Qu and Dumay, 2011). In this study, the purpose is to investigate online deliberation practices from two angles: cognition and morality. By offering an alternative interpretation of such practices, we aim to extend the understanding of deliberation in the Chinese context. On the cognitive level, we focused on

Chinese people's understanding of the term 'difference' in online deliberation. The concept of difference here refers to thinking at the level of information, for example about different opinions and standpoints. It can be extended to the cognitive level of being different in deliberation, for example thinking about identities, consensus, communicative culture of harmony and some social norms in online communication. Therefore, the interview questions were designed to cover these main points. Additionally, deliberative theory discusses participants' cognitive ability, for example the ability to select, analyse, reflect on, and express information. It points to the process through which, given a diverse information environment, people learn and influence each other during deliberation. Therefore, some of our questions tried to get participants to recall if and how they learned, and how their opinions were formed during online deliberation. For example, people were asked to think back to how they got interested in a certain topic in the first place? What they did if they want to find more information about the topic? In what situation they usually became engaged in deliberation? What kind of opinions and information they usually pay attention to? And what kind of information they usually use to support their opinions?

On the moral level, our focus was on the communicative relationship participants built up with others through online deliberative activities. Considering the great weight that moral discourse carries for resolving conflicts and divergence in deliberative democracy, investigating thoughts, feelings, reasons, and attitudes as well as reactions to conflicting opinions in an online environment, is an ideal entry point for understanding online deliberation in a moral sense. Therefore, we concluded the interview with questions designed to collect information about how people react to, and deal with divergence and conflicts online; and whether and how it has anything to do with building, maintaining or strengthening their communicative relationship with other people? For example, people were asked to recall how they usually react to different opinions. If a divergence of opinion emerges during the communication, what does it mean to them? Do they usually want to avoid divergence? Why? What do they usually do to avoid online conflict? What kind of deliberation would be considered successful? What kind of deliberator would be considered a successful one? Have the online deliberation experiences they have had in the past mostly been successful, or not? And why? A list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

3.3.2.2 Identifying the Interviewees

- **The interviewees as ordinary internet social media users**

To choose the participants for the interview for this study, several aspects were considered. By seeing participants as ordinary internet users, I firstly tried to detect if there should be any specific sets of criteria in the recruiting process. According to the latest Statistical Report on the Social Network Users in China (CNNIC, 2016), the gender radio of male to female Chinese users is 52.4:47.6, which is very close to the gender radio of the male to the female in total Chinese population. It shows that, for considering online deliberation as one of the functional uses of the internet, the gender of participants makes little difference. Therefore, the study did not set any gender limit. On the age aspect, the majority of Chinese social network users is aged younger than 40. According to the statistics, 32.1% were aged 20-29, accounting for the largest proportion, and 24.3% were aged 30-39 (CNNIC, 2016). As can been seen here, to study the general participants in online deliberation, the interviewees whose age was between 20 and 39 is much preferred as the target population. Also, by considering the education background, 36.4% of the Chinese online users have a junior high school degree, 27.4% have a high school degree, and 12.8% have a bachelor's degree or above. Furthermore, comparing to other internet users, social network users are on the higher educational level. Taking Sina microblog for example, users who have high school degree accounts for 34.7%, which is 6.5% higher than the figure of the general internet users in the same year (CNNIC, 2016). Users who have a bachelor's degree and above is 25.8%, which is 14.3% higher than general internet users (CNNIC, 2016). This means, at the same time as focusing on the user group who have junior or high school degree, it is also necessary to include some participants on the higher educational level in order to distinguish the sample group from general online users.

- **The interviewees as the participants of online deliberation**

To better understand the practice of online deliberation, we decided to approach people. Most of them have participated in the online deliberations during the earthquake, and even not, they all have similar experience of engaging public deliberation in online forums. Considering about the study case, the Wenchuan earthquake happened in 2008, the time gap and the specific online forum settings make it very difficult to track down the exact participants who engaged some online activities in Tianya Online Forum back then. However, the disaster per se, or any sensational events happened during the disaster were not the interest in this research, but the online deliberation, which can be illustrated by various kinds of online deliberative activities, reasons and thoughts behind. They reveal some particular deliberative pattern can help us understand the online society in Chinese context. So, even though the participants may not have exactly the same experience of participating in online deliberation during the earthquake,

as long as they had engaged in any kind of deliberative activities online, they can still give me enough relevant information and thoughts, helping me better understand the process and meaning of deliberation online.

By "similar experience" here, we mean to emphasize, firstly, that the participant should have engaged in some kind of online deliberative activity, either text-based or non-textual. For example, they may have posted online, expressing their opinions in deliberation, or have engaged in other non-textual deliberative activities such as liking, sharing, clicking and viewing. The reason for including these non-textual forms of online expression is that we noticed they are used to an even greater extent, and are influential in gaining attention, attracting interest, information-sharing, and guiding public-opinion in the Chinese context (Chiang and Wang, 2015; Boczkowski and Mitchelsein, 2011; Lowery, 2010; Tenenboim and Cohen, 2013). Moreover, the "experience" we are talking about here is not posting just once or twice. We expected our participants to narrate their experience as a story. For example, they may have consistently paid attention to one or more sensational events, searching and learning relevant information from an online forum via communicative acts such as liking, sharing, clicking and viewing, having their opinion shaped, maybe expressing it as well (but not necessarily) through deliberation. Even if they never engage in text-based expression, participants can also contribute by explaining how their opinions were formed, or strengthened, or improved, or transformed by engaging in the deliberation process.

- **Number and method**

In addition, in relation to the number of participants, there were several other considerations. First, since the purpose of the interviews was only to generate data to assist us to better understand the data we collected from the online forum, we did not need many participants, but only a few, as key informants. Secondly, we had to consider the availability of time. The study had two months in which to collect the interview data. We planned to have at least one day for preparation, making contact, and transcribing an interview. We also needed to take into account that some key informants may not be available at the time proposed. In that case, we had to work around the time, arranging another interview. So, we decided to allocate 1-3 days to each case. Thirdly, we also considered data saturation. That is to say, as more and more people were interviewed, we supposed there was going to be a point where participants did not provide any new, additional insight. In other words, the information gathered would become

repetitive. Based on the above considerations, we planned to be flexible about the precise number of interviews, but aimed for between 20 and 35.

I planned to find participants with the help of acquaintances. Since a successful interview requires a smooth and open conversation between the interviewer and the participant, the common way to go about this is to establish a good working relationship, building trust, engaging with their vulnerability, so they can provide more information freely (Legard, et al., 2003). Thus, it would be easier for us to get to know the participants' personalities slightly, the way they prefer to be in a conversation, and their background, before entering into the actual interview. But surely, there is another option through which the interviewer can get to know participants? You can get to know them through the interview, but there remains a risk. After all, it is not easy to make someone whom you have just met open up to you in a very short time. Therefore, I preferred to start with someone who was not a total stranger, but with whom we were acquainted in one way or another on the basis that this would increase the efficiency of the interviews. I also targeted more participants using the technique of snowballing, namely being introduced to new participants by the existing participants.

- **Identifying the interviewees as debaters and instrumental users**

It has been a widely common understanding when it comes to research into Human-Computer (HCI) that media behavior is a key factor. Speaking from a methodological perspective, it means to enable a more precise analysis through reaching and distinguishing different user populations according to different types of media use (Brandtzag, 2010; Bunn, 1993). For social research, typologies of online users can help detect characteristic patterns based on categorical attributes, and the nature and the consequences behind them (Johnson and Kulpa, 2007). Some previous studies have shown that data can be used to identify the typological account of media users, such as the content-related preference of the users (for example Barnes et al., 2007; Heim et al., 2007), the time-assuming count (for example Roberts et al., 2004), and the frequency of utilization (for example Losh, 2003). However, the concept of identifying different users has not been applied widely in the data understanding. The usual quantitative method, in that case, is criticized for both being too personal which has no valid method to access the media behavior in general (Herman et al., 2007), and largely ignoring the fact that there are different patterns involving media use (Brandtzag and Heim, 2009).

For this purpose, this thesis adopts Brandtzag's (2010) model of media-user typologies, so relevant human-media researchers can better conduct the analysis accordingly. There are eight types of media user defined by media behaviors, including non-users, sporadics, debaters, entertainment users, socializers, lurkers, instrumental users, and advanced users (see Table 2 below in details).

Table 2: An initial unified Media-User Typology (MUT) and the four criteria for defining types by media behaviour (Brandtzag, 2010: 952).

User types	Frequency of use	Variety of use	Typical activity	Typical media platform
1) Non-users	No use	No use	no	All
2) Sporadics	Low use	Low variety	No particular activity. No contact with e-Government services. The internet is rarely used for private purposes. Low interest, less experienced.	All
3) Debaters	Medium use	Medium variety	Discussion and information acquisition and exchange. Purposeful action.	Blogs and SNS
4) Entertainment users	Medium use	Medium variety	Gaming or passively watching videos, but also advanced use, such as UGC, programming and shopping.	New media in general
5) Socializers	Medium use	Medium variety	Socializing, keeping in touch with friends and family, and connecting with new acquaintances. Active social life, but less organized and purposeful, more spontaneous and flexible.	SNS
6) Lurkers	Medium use	Low variety	Lurking, time-killing	SNSs, user-generated sites, shopping. And

				new media in general
7) Instrumental users	Medium use	Medium variety	Chose media content for information and civic purposes, utility oriented, often work related, searching for e-Government or public information, low on entertainment use, when shopping, comparing brands and promotional offers.	New media in general, including internet and online shopping
8) Advanced users	High use	High variety	All (gaming, homepage, design, shopping, programming, video, e-Government and UGC, etc.)	All

To come to a more specific and pertinent understanding of online deliberative behaviors and thought, I identified the interviewees for this research with the topologies of media users suggested in Brandztag's (2010) study. Since the number of participants I approached is limited, I aimed to focus on those who are the same type rather than different types of participants in the deliberation process. By doing that, it can allow me to understand their media behaviors with a more targeted measurement based on their online activity, for example their preferences and content selection. Meanwhile, it enables the conclusion drawn upon the specific user group to be more representative, so we can better identify and distinguish between different media behaviors in a given digital environment. Accordingly, a debater is defined as a medium user who is likely to engage in discussion and information acquisition and exchange with purposeful action. Instrumental users are choosing media content for information and civic purposes, utility oriented, searching for e-government or public information, low on entertainment use. In this research, I define them as quiet participants. Unlike lurkers, they are the group of people who can consistently and actively engage in online deliberation for other purposes as a priority rather than the expression of opinion, such as information-searching and learning. As a result, the way they engage is not mainly based on comments, or very informative comments, but others such as simple comments, likes, shares, clicks and views. Therefore, I picked up 30 of 35 participants according to the typologies discussed by Brandztag (2010) as instrumental users.

4 of them were former debaters but more likely instrumental users now. (see Table 3 identification information in details).

Table 3: The identification of the interviewees

Name	Age	Gender	Educational level	Media use type
1. Suri	28	Female	Master's	Instrumental users
2. Zheng H	28	Female	Master's	Instrumental users
3. Michael	28	Male	Master's	Former debater and now instrumental user
4. Gao YL	30	Female	High school	Former debater and now instrumental user
5. ZC	38	Male	Bachelor	Instrumental user
6. Zheng XJ	23	Female	High school	Instrumental user
7. Chen YD	23	Female	High school	Instrumental user
8. Ma S	22	Male	High school	Instrumental user
9. Fan HZ	22	Male	High school	Instrumental user
10. Shan L	28	Male	Bachelor	Instrumental user
11. Wu QY	21	Female	High school	Instrumental user
12. Da S	39	Male	Bachelor	Instrumental user
13. Wu Q	28	Male	Bachelor	Former debater and now instrumental user
14. Guo W	26	Female	High school	Instrumental user
15. Wang LL	22	Female	High school	Instrumental user
16. Liu	30	Male	Bachelor	Instrumental user
17. Zhong R	23	Male	High school	Instrumental user
18. 2jin	22	Female	High school	Instrumental user
19. Linda	23	Female	Bachelor	Instrumental user
20. PSK	22	Male	High school	Instrumental user
21. MTX	22	Female	High school	Instrumental user
22. Papa	25	Male	Bachelor	Instrumental user
23. Zhai HY	21	Male	High school	Instrumental user
24. Lao X	27	Female	Bachelor	Instrumental user
25. Lv JH	23	Female	High school	Former debater and now instrumental user
26. Huang XB	23	Female	High school	Instrumental user
27. Pan Y	27	Female	Bachelor	Instrumental user
28. Wang ZR	25	Female	Bachelor	Instrumental user
29. Tina	23	Female	High school	Instrumental user
30. Na Y	26	Male	Bachelor	Instrumental user

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Content analysis and design

We used content analysis to interpret the data from the online forum and interviews. The aim was to be able to "cut" the raw data into pieces and logically recombine them through

interpretation of empirical and theoretical understanding (Wahyuni, 2012). Content analysis is widely used for this purpose, especially with text-based research materials. It can be defined as "a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding" (Stemler, 2001: 1). In particular, content analysis focuses on the form and substance of communication (Holsti, 1969). It is a method of arriving at a "subjective interpretation of the textual content through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1278). It is a good method to choose when there is a large amount of textual research data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), and can help researchers to access knowledge and understandings that underlie the text (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). Thus, with the help of content analysis, we can not only examine the knowledge and understanding behind textual content, but may be able to detect the context in which the information was produced, and further transfer this approach and related results to the analysis of other textual materials in the same setting. So, we can analyse not only the online posts and replies, but also the process by which they were created, thus creating an interpretative basis from which to answer the research question. These are results that statistical analysis is unable to deliver.

In this study, we coded all the messages in the sample based on the coding categories in Graham and Witschge's (2003) study. In their study, Graham and Witschge aimed to explore a new research method that to a certain extent would be able to verify a series of hypotheses about deliberation theory in the online public sphere related to the process of understanding. For Graham and Witschge (2003), the process of understanding is: 1) rational-critical debate in which participants offer and respond with reasons and justifications at the knowledge level, and continually communicate with coherent information until final consensus emerges; 2) reciprocity, which is considered as mutual opportunity and as a basis for people to learn knowledge; and 3) reflexivity, which is the ideal way to improve learning. To fulfil this objective, the coding process proceeds on three levels: 1) the content type of messages - for example initial, response and irrelevant messages; 2) the argumentative form presented in messages - for example, counter-argument, rebuttal, refute-to-rebuttal; 3) and the type of reasoning/evidence in messages - for example assertion, examples, factual information. These coding categories, on the one hand, "avoid one of the major pitfalls of using content analysis, producing superficial results" (Graham and Witschge, 2003: 180). On the other hand, they help the researcher to explore the data, and to consider it comprehensively at different levels of online deliberation.

Inspired by their coding categories, I coded all the online materials in the study on two levels. In the first coding round, I coded all the messages according to opinion-type, for example supportive vs. oppositional, simple vs. evidential. Doing this enabled us to analyse the general positioning of an online message in the sense of whether they were different, and how much they differed. it also helped us construct a framework of understanding, to make connections between the two ideas: being different and how they differed, making sense of people's expressive behaviours in an online context in which conflict was evident.

Message Type:

- **Initial Post**

A. Initial non-rational-argument: messages which were not a response to another message without a reason or justification accompanied, but the initial line of argument. They could include:

B. Initial rational-argument: any message which provided a validity claim accompanied by a reason or justification, which was not a response to another message but was an initial line of argument.

- **Replies**

Messages that mentioned other participant's or participants' message(s), citing them either directly or indirectly ("indirectly" means when the content of the message can be seen as matching and replying to the content of another).

A. Support: messages that took a similar stance, or held similar opinions to the initial post.

A1. Simple Support: messages in support of an initial post that were not accompanied by reasoned/justified validity claim(s) or/and information.

A2. Evidential Support: messages supporting the initial post by providing a reasoned/justified validity claim(s) or/and information.

A3. Simple Support + Abuse: messages in support of the initial post that were not accompanied by reasoned/justified validity claim(s) or/and information but which used abusive language.

A4. Evidential Support + Abuse: messages supporting the initial post by providing reasoned/justified validity claim(s) or/and information but which also contained abusive language.

B. Opposition: messages that expressed different opinions, or took a stance opposed to the initial post.

B1. Simple Opposition: messages that expressed opposition, but which were not accompanied by reasoned/justified validity claim(s) or/and information.

B2. Evidential Opposition: messages that expressed opposition to the initial post and provided reasoned/justified claim(s) or/and information.

B3. Simple Opposition + Abuse: messages that expressed opposition to the initial post, that were not accompanied by reasoned/justified validity claim(s) or/and information, but which used abusive language.

B4. Evidential Opposition + Abuse: messages that expressed opposition to the initial post by providing reasoned/justified claim(s) or/and information, and also used abusive language.

C. Neutral: messages that were neutral, or did not display a clear opinion preference, but which were still related to the topic.

C1. Simple Neutral: messages that were neutral, or did not display a clear opinion preference, but which lacked reasoned/justified validity claim(s) or/and information.

C2. Evidential Neutral: messages that were neutral, or did not display a clear opinion preference, but which also offered reasoned/justified claim(s) or/and information.

C3. Simple Neutral + Abuse: messages that were neutral, or did not display a clear opinion preference, that lacked reasoned/justified validity claim(s) or/and information, and used abusive language.

C4. Evidential Neutral + Abuse: messages that were neutral, or did not display a clear opinion preference, that also offered reasoned/justified claim(s) or/and information, but which also used abusive language.

D. Irrelevant: messages unrelated to the discussion topic.

D1. Irrelevant + Abuse: messages unrelated to the discussion topic, involving abusive language.

E. Pure Abuse: messages that offered neither information nor opinion, but which used abusive language.

In the second coding round, messages were further coded based on the content of the reasoning, for example analogy, assumption, examples, or knowledge, and the mode of reasoning , for example, support, opposition or neutral. This provided some clues for talking about online deliberation in terms of participants' ability, as well as at the moral level. A detailed discussion of how this assessment was designed is offered below.

- **Evidential Posts**

The second level of coding, which assessed the use of evidence in a message in support of its claim(s) or critique of claim(s). All messages that were selected for coding under the categories above were then further coded for their type of counter-evidence used and the way how it is used.

A. Evidential Support

A1. supported-by-analogy/example: messages that supported their claim(s) with analogies and/or analogical examples.

A2. supported-by-assumption/assertion: messages in which the author supported their claim(s) with assumptions or/and assertions.

A3. supported-by-experience: messages in which the author used personal or/and second-hand experience to support a claim.

A4. supported-by-facts: messages that supported their claim(s) with factual evidence (note that the validity of this evidence was not checked, due to the time frame).

A5. supported-by-common-sense: messages that supported their claim with common sense (defined as the ability to perceive, understand and judge without need of debate, according to the post's author).

A6. supported-by-knowledge: messages that supported their claim with professional knowledge.

A7. supported-by-value and logic: messages that supported their claim with logic or/and value.

B. Evidential Opposition

B1. Opposed-by-analogy/example: messages that opposed the initial post with analogies and/or analogical examples.

B2. Opposed-by-assumption/assertion: messages in which the author opposed the initial post by making assumptions or/and assertions.

B3. Opposed-by-experience: messages in which the author used personal or/and second-hand experience to oppose the initial post.

B4. Opposed-by-factual: messages which opposed the initial post by providing factual evidence (note here that the validity of this evidence was not checked, due to the time frame).

B5. Opposed-by-common sense: messages that opposed the initial post by using common sense (the ability to perceive, understand and judge things without need of debate according to the post's author).

B6. Opposed-by-knowledge: messages that opposed the initial post with knowledge.

B7. Opposed-by-value and logic: message which oppose the initial post with logic or/and values.

C. Neutral

C1. Neutral-by-analogy/example: neutral messages that used analogies and/or analogical examples.

C2. Neutral-by-assumption/assertion: messages in which the author expressed neutral opinions by making assumptions or/and assertions.

C3. Neutral-by-experience: messages in which the author used personal or/and second-handed experience to support a neutral stance.

C4. Neutral-by-factual: neutral messages that offered factual evidence (note here that the validity of the evidence could not be checked, due to the time frame).

C5. Neutral-by-common sense: messages that used common sense (the ability to perceive, understand and judge things without needing to be debated, in the author's opinion) to support a neutral stance.

C6. Neutral-by-knowledge: messages that used knowledge to support a neutral stance.

C7. Neutral-by-value and logic: messages that used logic, and making sense of values, to support a neutral stance.

[Note]: In the second around, a single message might include different types of evidential information, meaning that it could be coded under multiple categories.

3.4.2 Assessment Design

This section focuses on making sense of the coding categories for analysing online deliberation in the Chinese context. My aim is to figure out how the outcomes of online deliberation can be assessed by coding posts and replies, in relation to the ideal deliberation model discussed

above: 1) educating qualified participants both in terms of the acquisition of information and of improving their ability to deliberate; 2) inducing them act deliberatively in a moral sense.

3.4.2.1 Studying online deliberation on the cognitive level

3.4.2.1.1 Approach to different opinions

After coding all sample posts and replies, we had a general understanding of online deliberation according to the information type. In relation to information-acquisition, deliberative theory addresses the deliberative process by discussing different opinions, regarding this as the precondition for communication that is deliberative, and as force that drives people to reason with one another in the first place. As such, the starting point for understanding online deliberation is to figure out whether differences in online opinions were also the driving force for people to start and sustain deliberations. To do that, we focused on the relationship between the number of supportive messages and those that expressed opposition. This helped us think about whether online deliberation, in general, could be activated by an environment of difference or one of similarity. We were also able to compare cases where the message content was very diverse (those in which the number of supportive and oppositional messages were approximately equal), to cases in which content was very similar (namely a preponderance of one type of message over the other), to explore the consequences of these differences. For example, we analyzed the way evidential messages changed in each case, i.e.., the use of evidence in support of the claim(s) in a message, or in a critique of claim(s). As a major part of the reasoning process, evidential messages were the main source of increases in effective information in deliberations. They also influenced other participants engaged in this deliberation in other ways, shaping deliberative environments of similarity and difference. By focusing on evidential messages, we will be able to see the effect of the promotion or repression of conflicting opinions on the information content of messages – specifically whether and how this brings effective information increment to online deliberation as consequence.

Further, deliberative theory has developed the discussion of "difference" at a cognitive level, talking about people as participants in deliberation. We used this approach for our analysis of online material. For example, we compared changes in supportive evidential messages in cases of difference with those cases of similarity of opinion. We did the same with oppositional evidential messages, to see which opinion environment was more significantly influenced by the deliberative environment, and why this might be. We also combined what we learned from the interviews, to see whether the quantity of any particular kind of message underwent a more

dramatic change from an environment of difference to one of similarity, and analyse the possible causes from the perspective of participants. Furthermore, we can also analyze the content of the type of evidential information that changed most, for example whether this was critical oppositional information or supplementary supportive information. In this way, the phenomenon of difference could act as a window through which we were able better understand online deliberation as an information base, and how people in turn interact with each other in the deliberative environment, further how the people react deliberatively, contributing to this information base,

At the same time, it is necessary to take abusive messages into account in understanding online deliberation. In many studies of online communication, abusive messages have been regarded as a vital part, known as "flaming" for example, which refers to strong, hostile, online emotional expression. It is considered closely associated with the virtuality and interactivity of the internet setting (Self and Meyer, 1991; Walther, 1996; Castella et al., 2000). Some research has pointed out that, when compared with offline communication, there is much less social pressure in an online environment (Walther, 1996). This suggests that the focus in offline face-to-face settings, which is more audience-orientated, shifts to "expression" in online settings (Siegel et al., 1986). Especially in the Chinese context, there is a series of social and cultural norms, including the content of audience-orientation. Moreover, conflict is not a phenomenon that exists only in the online public sphere. In fact, it is usually prevalent in everyday communicative life as well. In that sense, abusive messages and forms of expression may not be directly produced by online conflict, but could just be one of the ways in which people choose to deal with different opinions in (any) communication. This being so, we wondered whether online communicative behaviors, which are considered to be more impersonal, task-directed, self-interested, temporary, and the opposite of cooperative and other-oriented, could create an online communicative environment which is not conducive to deliberation by being problem-solving and averse to conflict as some studies have showed (for example, Sproull and Kiesler, 1986; Foster, 1997).

As part of deliberation, studying abusive messages not only offers us a way to get a general insight into the online deliberative environment, but can also be a way to study online participants, for example their attitudes, thoughts, logic and the strategic patterns that underlie their deliberative behavior in situations of conflict in public communication. To do this, we first calculated the proportion of all abusive messages in the sample, in order to get a general

idea of the communicative situation in China. For example, if expressions of abuse are a big part of online communication as mentioned in some studies, it could suggest that, in a diverse online information communication setting, people may be more likely to become aggressive, abusive and offensive, rather than cooperative, considerate and other-oriented, than in offline discussions. We can also calculate the proportion of abusive messages in both the supportive and oppositional message samples, and to try to connect this with what we learn from the interviews, to explore the reasons behind the phenomenon. For example, if abusive messages turn out to be a larger part of oppositional expression than supportive, might this mean people be more likely to express themselves in an aggressive way when confronted with the emergence of different opinions in online communication? We can also launch the analysis by asking ourselves some questions. For example, what is the logic of the evolution from the initial expression of different opinions into a situation of conflict? And does such an environment of conflict necessarily make any difference to online deliberation in the sense of increasing/reducing the information content, for example by causing less oppositional opinions to be created as part of the deliberation process, or by discouraging interactions that function as a process of information-acquisition. By investigating the role of abusive expression and asking such questions, we can see that we should not discount its importance in online communicative deliberation in the Chinese context.

The analysis of interview materials is an indispensable part of helping us understand "difference" in deliberation. We chose to start by understanding deliberation in the Chinese mind, rather than by focusing directly on conflictual settings in online deliberation. In fact, online deliberation works both ways. Participants are both influenced by deliberation in the online environment and influence the deliberation process and outcomes through different deliberative behaviors. In an online setting, participants can play multiple roles and are mostly independent of one another in deliberation. For example, they can be information givers, behaving in a way to defend their own opinions, or offer supplementary information to support others; or argue and criticize by offering different opinions during deliberation. They can also be information takers, taking a critical standpoint or a supportive one by reading others' messages. They can even just be information-learners without expressing themselves in words, just by taking an interest in knowing and learning as an "outsider". Each role derives from different participant motives, provokes different reactions, and influence deliberative outcomes in different ways. In the Chinese context, they are also closely associated with the traditional communicative culture, social norms, expressive habits, and logical pattern. As a result,

different opinions in deliberations cannot simply be equated with the appearance of conflicting and confrontational opinions. In other words, different opinions would not necessary lead to a conflict. There is an evolutionary process through which communication becomes a conflict. And the form of this process can vary depending on different social-political contexts. Therefore, it is necessary for us to find out if the online communicative setting contributes to, or impedes, deliberation to a certain extent, in the case of "difference". More importantly, we need to understand the online setting in the Chinese context without taking for granted the context of conflict in online deliberation. We need to find out if it is, and how it is, by contextualizing both online deliberation practices and the situation.

In addition, we can approach the conflicting context of online deliberation through understanding the term of consensus in Chinese sense. As a means of solving problems and settling differences, deliberation is considered to be a dynamic process between possible conflict and possible forms of consensus. As Karpowitz and Mansbridge (2005) put it, there is a dynamic process of updating in deliberation in which "facilitators probe for possible conflicts as well as possible forms of cooperation and participants feel comfortable in exploring conflicts as well as in building bonds of solidarity, creating shared value, and finding unexpected points of congruence" (p. 348). However, no matter in which direction the deliberation is led, there is always deliberative thinking behind people's communicative behaviors, related to causing conflicts or reaching consensus. This offers us a way to understand "difference" by understanding "consensus" in the Chinese context. Some evidence can be found in certain aspects of Chinese communicative culture, such as the traditional 'harmony concept' for example, to fill-out the interpretative framework. For example, is consensus a necessary aim for Chinese people to engage in, or to stay in, deliberative communication on an everyday basis? Is it also a motivation for people to engage online deliberation? What is the cultural logic behind such consensus-oriented or non-consensus-oriented behaviors and phenomena online? And by behaving in these ways, how are people influenced in relation to information-learning in deliberation?

3.4.2.1.2 Approaching the ability of online participants

To understand deliberation through participants' ability, we planned to approach from three directions: ability *per se*, past deliberation experience, and quiet participants. Deliberative ability can also have a two-way interactive impact on participants. For one thing, their communication behaviors, both in form and in content, can be largely determined by their own

ability. For another, deliberation as a communicative experience learned from the past can also change participants in one way or another; for example, in how they learn, use information, and express themselves online, so that they can influence others more. Therefore, the discussion of deliberative ability in participation does not just pay attention to abilities *per se*, but also to lessons in deliberation that participants' have learned in the past, can change them at a cognitive level. Although some of them are quiet participants, which means those who do not express themselves in written form, we cannot rule out the possible influence of the deliberative environment, in causing such a pattern of expression, and any deliberative ability they have now acquired. On the other hand, we can also take an audience approach, for example, by paying attention to the preference of quiet participants in relation to information-selection and management, or by examining the findings from the online textual materials from an audience perspective.

In consideration of this, I mainly approached the ability of text-based participants through the analysis of their use of evidence in online messages. This allowed us to access, for example, the extent to which participants have reflected on their own views and reasoned things out rationally themselves for others with certain types of evidential information. As a process of acquiring information, deliberation indicates that someone has found, and added, knowledge to alter their original position, slightly or greatly. Looking at the type of evidence can tell us to what extent the participant understands his alternative opinion. For example, we may consider that participants who use facts and examples/analogies as counter-evidence may have deeper understanding than those who use assertion, assumption and experience, as the former generally requires more thinking. They are also able to use evidence to discount or contradict the initial claims. Participants address the initial claims by way of offering factual information evidence to challenge them, which could also mean that they have given deep thought to the issue. If participants can use factual evidence to support their claims, and also challenge the target message with knowledge and logic, it indicates an even higher understanding and use of knowledge (learning) related to an issue, because they use a combination of both the functions of evidence to make their points well.

At the same time, we analyzed the interview materials mainly to assess the ability of quiet participants by seeing them from two perspectives: as information taker and information giver. As information taker, analysis begins by seeking answers to a series of questions related to information collection, selection and analysis, contributing to opinion formation. For example,

what kind of information do they usually pay more attention to? What information resources do they usually use to find more information about a topic? Is there any pattern of information-taking we can follow? How are they influenced by online communicative settings and the information environment we detected from online messages for information-taking? In this study, we could not ask direct questions in the interview to collect more evidence about the ability of participants. For one thing, the online deliberation we studied was considered as a social conversation that ordinary citizens participate in as part of their everyday communicative lives. So, we wanted to uncover their intuitive responses and behaviors in their most natural, primary and undisturbed states. In that sense, a direct approach would lose its value by pointing out our intentions. Consequently, what we did with the interview materials was to detect phenomena by answering those indirect questions. In that way, we were able to analyze skills, strategies and capabilities through understanding those phenomena. We also analyzed their ability to the extent that it was caused by the information environment and communicative settings. In that sense, we paid attention to any influences or reasons drawn from the information environment and communicative settings that cultivated their abilities, as "consequences". For example, we questioned to what extent participants were capable of forming their opinions. Did they collect and select information independently, or were they more likely to be influenced by mainstream media and opinions? How much was it to do with the communicative settings and information environment? How did they react to the online information environment we found in the online messages? And what was their ability to think and behave deliberately based on their reaction to the online information environment?

For information giving, the study approached participants' ability to give information by focusing on text-based and non-textual means of online expression in online deliberation. For quiet participants especially, the value of online expression is not mainly represented in words, but in deliberative thinking and behaviors. To talk about online expression in the Chinese context, we have to keep in mind that the influence of Chinese communicative culture and social traditions have cultivated certain communicative thoughts and led to certain expressive behaviors. Sometimes, these are not consistent in form (which we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter). Compared to the content of expression in words, expression in thought matters more for understanding expressive behaviors, especially for non-text-based behaviors in the online environment. As such, we began our analysis here, to figure out any possible pattern of their deliberative thinking, by asking some simple questions, for example, what kind of information they usually selected, for reasoning about their opinions online? What kind of

information did they find hard to use? And easy? How did they prefer to use it in general? What we tried to do was to get some common "phenomena" related to their logics about information-use in general. Starting from there, we were able to provide a different interpretation of the phenomena based on the Chinese communicative context and its main characteristics. For example, we followed up by asking whether the information considered the most difficult was that which was used the least in online deliberation? What did some online communicative settings contribute to this situation? What was the correlation between this phenomenon and traditional Chinese communication culture, for example the concept of Chinese modesty and "face" culture? What kind of expressive behavior was led by particular expressive thoughts? And what could that behaviors tell us about a participants' ability?

3.4.2.2 Investigating online deliberation on the moral level

3.4.2.2.1 Detecting the possible online moral phenomena: The model of interactivity

As have discussed in the last chapter, the morality manifests in deliberation on two dimensions: the minority vs. the majority, and advantaged vs. the disadvantaged. For pubic deliberation, the ideally good deliberation in the moral sense is to see whether the interests of the disadvantaged group are guaranteed, making sure their voices are heard properly. In that case, the advantaged or/and majority group can be considered as deliberative if they are open-minded, considerate, and other-oriented, so the opinions of the minority can be well responded. On the other side, the disadvantaged and minority group are required to be more persistent to make a communication deliberative enough. That is to say, they need to stand their ground, maintaining a strong enough influence through opinion expression. This moral design enables deliberation to happen in a way more cooperation-friendly, consensus-oriented and individual-interest-equalized.

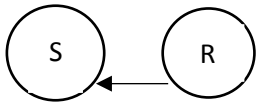
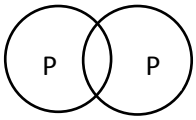
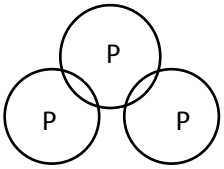
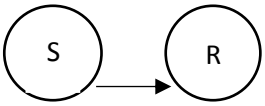
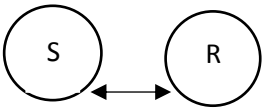
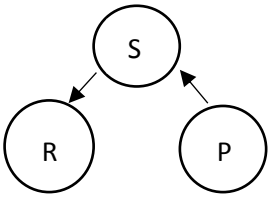
To be specific in empirical practice, the online deliberations never lack controversial conversations. By coding the online posts and replies, I found that there was always a clear boundary between different opinions, usually either supportive or oppositional, but that they were rarely neutral. Moreover, there can be great disparity in the degree of discursive power between different opinion groups. In some topic-centered discussions, we could see that one opinion group had an absolute advantage in numbers, and maybe in quality of information as well, compared to the other. In general, people are most influenced by the majority group, and mainstream opinions usually influence the deliberation in a more significant way than the minority group, but not the other way around. Moreover, this effect is considered to do more

bad than good in the moral sense. For example, some studies have found that the perspectives and expressions of minority group may be marginalized or silenced under pressure from the majority online (for example Lugones,1994). Also, some findings from studies of online opinion polarization have claimed that individuals are more easily inclined to listen and accept those opinions that are consistent with their potential preference orientation (Sherif and Hovland, 1961; Dion, et al., 1970), and dismiss the opinions of out-groups (Sinclair and Kunda, 2000). Based on the relative findings, I was thinking if such phenomena can be detected through exploring the interactivity between different online opinion groups, so they can be given the relevant understanding in a moral sense.

That points to the task of identifying the interactions between different online opinion groups. However, I will define some important concepts to this model. First of all, what is interactivity? It is also the concept which inspires the model design in the first place. In Ferber et al.'s (2007) study, they introduced the concept of interactivity on the basis of the interactivity model of McMillian's (2002) work (see Table 4).

To use this model to evaluate the contribution of websites to online democracy, they considered two roles: the websites as an information sender, and the individuals who use the websites as the users. They can relate each other in three forms. The one-way communication includes the feedback form and the monologue form. In both forms, the arrow of the information flow is unidirectional, pointing either to the information receivers or the senders. They suggested that most corporate websites are identified under this category. In the two-way communication including the mutual discourse form and the responsive dialogue form, the information flow between information senders and receivers is bidirectional. Only in the mutual discourse form, participants can play both roles of the information sender and the receiver, and both of them are considered to have more equal control over the process compared with responsive dialogue form. In other words, it has a higher level of interaction. They considered that online chatrooms and bulletin boards are good examples in that category. Based on this, they have three-way communication, taking third parties into account, including forms of controlled response and public discourse. The controlled response form of interactivity, such as a poll which provides good opportunities to participants but at the same time has significant control over its content. The public discourse of interactivity, on the contrary, such as online forums and chat rooms, means that the participants have almost unrestrained control on the content compared to the very limited control from websites.

Table 4: A six-part model of cyber-interactivity

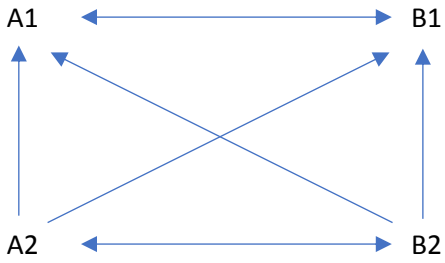
Level of Receiver Control	Direction of communication: One-way	Two-way	Three-way
High	Feedback 	Mutual discourse 	Public discourse 
Low	Monologue 	Responsive dialogue 	Controlled response 

[note]: S = sender; R = receiver; P = participant (where sender/receiver roles are interchangeable).

Therefore, by borrowing ideas from this model of the user-to-medium interactivity, I built up a model for detecting user-to-user interactivity between mainly four different online opinion groups. After coding all messages into simple support, evidential support, simple opposition, evidential opposition, simple neutrality, evidential neutrality, abuse and, finally, digression categories, I found the ratio of the neutral messages, the abusive messages and digressive messages are very small, and made up only around 29% of the whole sample. As a result, I set up the interactivity model by mainly considering the interactions between four opinion groups: simple support, evidential support, simple opposition and evidential opposition. As participants, even though people hold different opinions, they can play both roles of being information providers – in this case as an opinion expresser, an information receiver, and an online message reader. However, as simple information providers and evidential ones, they may have a different influence on each other. That is why this model also needs to be built through identifying the roles of each opinion group in their interactive relationship, for example who is the major influencer having an impact on whom. By doing this, I was able to determine the main relationship between opinion groups in the interaction, making sense of the comparison by constructing an interaction model.

In general, the simple opinion group was usually the group that was more influenced by the evidential opinion group and other simple opinion groups, rather than being the group that was doing the influencing, since there was always much more effective information in evidential messages, not just claims and assertions as in simple messages. This was also supported by our interview materials when most participants talked about their experience of opinion formation during deliberations. On the other side, as simple opinions usually contain little evidential information, the influence of individual simple opinions could be quite limited, unless they had an absolute predominance of quantity. In most cases, however, single simple opinions can be easily dismissed, especially by those who hold different opinions. As a result, in this model we consider that the simple opinion group deliberates under the influence of other evidential and simple opinion groups, no matter whether they are in the same opinion camp or not. Likewise, the evidential group exerts influence on other simple and evidential opinion groups, no matter whether they are in the same opinion camp or not. We found no sound evidence to show whose influence was dominant among different evidential opinion groups, or between different simple opinion groups. Therefore, we decided that the interactive relationship between them was one of mutuality and equality. As shown below, we created a model of the interaction between four different opinion groups (see Table 5).

Table 5: Direction of Influence Framework



	Support	Opposite
Simple	A1	B1
Evidential	A2	B2

Based on the model of interactivity from Ferber et al.'s (2007) work, I consider the interactivity reflected in a deliberative communication should not only be a result rather a dynamic process. In Ferber et al.'s work, they see interactivity as a result, and use it as a reference point for recognizing the nature of the websites, as not all websites are designed to be interactive. Quite differently, as one of the main fundamental features for websites such as online forums (Ferber, et al., 2007), the extent of the interactivity between different opinion groups needs to be further measured for detecting any possible phenomena which we can use to understand online deliberation with a moral viewpoint. Chung (2004) considered interactivity to be on a continuum, in which the human-to-machines interaction is the lowest level, while the human-

to-human is the highest. This is especially true when considering deliberative thinking, because the role moral elements plays in the formation of opinions and the judgment to opinion preference is not a one-time action, rather a phenomenon or a development trend represented in (and by) the whole deliberation process, being reflected in individual participant's actions (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2006; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996) and feedback to that action afterwards (Goodin and Niemeyer, 2003; Niemeyer, 2004, 2011).

It is worth mentioning that the moral values detected here are understood as moral intuition, where moral judgment is usually stimulated in response to a certain moral environment. As an alternative to the rational understanding of moral thought, moral intuition is discussed on the basis of social intuitionalism, pointing out that some moral judgements, especially those which are not very complex, are not made exactly based on moral reasoning (Haidt, 2001). They are rather quick and automatic responses relying, sometimes over-relying, on emotions and feelings out of constant learning and reasoning processes as well as childhood cognitive experience (e.g. Batson, 1998; Goffman, 2000; Pizzaro and Bloom, 2003). For most online deliberation, moral actions do not usually happen under a systematized ethical decision-making process. For most online participants, they make certain moral judgments by thinking inwardly based on a sketchy representation of facts. As the similar context of giving aesthetic judgment, one could be able to make such moral judgment at the moment without really trying, because they barely ruminate a process such as a complicated moral mental analysis. As a result, even though we cannot deny that deliberation plays a role in real-world moral thought, mostly being reflected in moral reasoning in an after-the-fact justification (see more in Pizzaro and Bloom, 2003), the process in reality can be a product of momentary emotions and external stimuli. In other words, once individuals are stimulated by certain moral contexts during the deliberation process, emotions and intuitions will trigger relevant moral intuition, causing individuals to make spontaneous moral judgments.

For that reason, I divided all the messages evenly into 10 groups according to the count of replies in each case, seeing every group as a processing unit. In each unit, we recorded the number for each type of message according to the coding result, including simple support, evidential support, simple opposition and evidential opposition. We then made a graph of the changing curve with the numbers. By doing that, we were able to compare the interaction between these four opinion groups. To be exact, what we tried to do was to figure out the extent to which two different opinion groups, for example, simple opposition and evidential support,

interacted with each other by comparing the difference between the changes in the number of simple oppositional opinions and evidential support opinions (this is just an example; there is detailed explanation of which two groups we assigned for comparison in a later section), and, further, the possibility of arriving at consensus in each case. The analysis of the interactivity between different opinion groups provided some evidence that helped us understand online deliberation practices by offering some reasonable interpretation of the Chinese context.

3.4.2.2.2 Detecting the possible online moral phenomena: The calculation of the interactivity

To be able to measure the extent of the interaction between different opinion groups, the following question needs to be answered first: what can be used as indicators to detect the phenomenon for us to determine the strength of the interactivity between two certain opinion groups? According to previous studies, multiple tools have been used to detect the human-to-human kind of interactivity. For example, Rice and Williams (1984) think the starting point for addressing such interactivity is to look up the exchange between the information sender and receivers. Also, Heeter (1989) understood such interactivity in the sense of the responsiveness to users, or the facilities of interpersonal communication. For this study, therefore, interactivity is defined on the dimension of opinion preference transformation. To be specific, the largest amount of interactivity between people is believed to happen when communication make opinion transformation possible. In online deliberation, the interaction is inevitable between different opinions emerging and aggregating all in the public online space. The function of moral values, as I have discussed earlier, usually involves how people define themselves in groups as group members and outside group as individuals, how to deal with divergence including opinion they agree and disagree, how they make judgments by considering different values such as equality, fairness, self-interest and common good. These can be all captured in the amount of opinion shift during the communication, and how this occurs. For example, if the amount of supporting opinions is declining and the amount of opposing opinions is increasing over time, it could be considered as an interactivity functioning between those two opinion groups. We can therefore understand by observing that people take different opinions, and deal with disagreement and conflict under a moral framework. By considering four opinion groups in this study, the way in which, and extent they interact with one other is definitely different.

To measure that, I introduced a measurement to calculate the degree of change between two different opinion lines in each unit. To compare two different opinion groups from the same

opinion camp, for example simple support vs. evidential support, interactive influence is embodied in synclastic changes in the two opinion lines. In other words, the higher the degree of similarity between those two opinion lines, the greater the extent to which they interact with each other, thus the more they may each influence the other. So, to quantify the similarity, we firstly calculated the "change". The way we got the "change" was by calculating change in the numbers of one line of opinion within a unit segment, namely by subtracting the end value from the initial value for that point on the opinion line in the unit segment. This can show an increase, where the subtraction result is a positive number, or a decrease, where the subtraction result is a negative number. To be able to quantify the extent of the interaction between two different lines of opinion, we then calculated the absolute value of the "difference" by subtracting the "change" value of two different opinion lines within the same one-unit segment. For instance, line A shows simple supportive opinion line, and line B shows evidential supportive opinions, and both are from the supportive opinion camp. They had an interactive deliberative relationship with each other. Line A increased 3, while line B decreased 4 (-4) within the same unit segment. So the extent of interactivity between these two opinion lines in this unit should be |3-(-4)|=7. In this case, the lower the resulting number, the greater the similarity between these two opinion lines, meaning that these two opinion lines interacted with each other more in deliberation.

Likewise, comparing two different opinion groups in different opinion camps, for example simple opposition vs. simple support, interactive influence is embodied in the inverse relationship between two opinion lines. In other words, the more the shape of the lines are NOT like each other, the greater extent to which they interact. In that case, we need to quantify the extent of inverse-similarity to measure the interactivity. In the same way, we calculated the "change" value of every opinion line for each unit segment, which could be an increase or a decrease. However, in this case, we calculated the absolute value of the "difference", which is the result of subtracting the "change" in one opinion line from the (negative) other, by adding the "change" values of two opinion lines in the same one-unit segment together. For example, the supportive opinion line C and the oppositional opinion line D interacted deliberatively with each other. In the same unit segment, when C line increased 3, D line decreased 4 (-4). So the extent of interactivity between them in this unit is |3-[-(-4)]= |3+(-4)|=1. Likewise, the lower the number, the greater difference between the two opinion lines is, meaning that these two opinion lines interacted with each other more in this deliberation unit. Moreover, following this logic, when the extent of synclastic interaction is greater than inverse one, deliberation more

likely plays a role in polarising different opinions. Otherwise, deliberation is more likely to play a role in assimilating different opinions, leading to a possible form of consensus.

Certainly, to detect such an interactivity phenomenon with a moral perspective, there are some conditions which must be considered when building this model. First of all, as the guide frame for leading me to build this model, the two dimensions of deliberative theory addressed in the moral sense, including the ideal moral standard for deliberativeness between the majority and the minority, and between the advantaged and the disadvantaged, are not necessarily the exact conclusion the model was looking for. In fact, I doubt if any moral value can be exactly detected directly, as in the past two decades the studies of the moral judgment process is mainly driven by relevant phenomenal evidences in fields such as brain sciences and psychology (for example Haidt, 2001; Young and Koenigs, 2007; Moll, De Oliveira-Souza, and Eslinger, 2003). Also, very broadly according to rationalists, morals should be found and defined by reasoning and reflection (for example Smith, 2004; Habermas, 1971). In fact, what I am interested to do with this model is to detect the existing differences in the interactive information exchange between different opinion groups under, and try to connect it with a moral understanding. In that case, therefore, the findings of this model may not offer an explanation of the online moral behaviors, thinking and feelings. Even though, it can be thought of as a starting point, as we begin to understand this phenomenon in a moral sense.

Secondly, this is a model built only upon opinion-directed content (comments and replies). There are certainly various means of expression in online forums, mainly including clicking, sharing the topic or commenting on a post somewhere to resume a discussion. As a result, interactivity can be produced once there is any expressive actions taken between information offers and information receivers. However, when discussing interactivity in the sense of opinion transformation as a moral phenomenon, those opinion-directed ones are more preferred for this study. Except for comments, opinion information cannot be represented well by clicking and sharing as online behaviors. They can only indicate, to some extent, the preference for different ways of participating online (for example Boczkowski, 2010a), or message content preferences (for example Boczkowski, 2010b). On the other side, 'liking' something on an online forum as a communicative form of behavior can be defined as form of opinion-directed "message". According to Kim and Yang (2017), a 'like' is more likely to be an 'affective' response to messages rather than a 'cognitive' one. As a social behavior, liking a message is on the lowest or 'consuming' level (Chuang, 2004), defined by participatory action without

substantive contributions such as creating new information for reading or watching (Muntiga et al., 2011). Even though it meets the identification of interactivity, under which users normally offer an opinion and can modify the content or the structure of the general opinion environment, the extent to which 'liking' initiates two-way communication is extremely limited - given by the interactive structure of the platform. Therefore, to consider the model of detecting human-to-human interactivity, 'liking' as an expressive behavior was not considered as part of online opinion interaction.

Last but not the least, it is worth mentioning that the opinion transformation used to represent interactivity is understood for its behavioral significance, but not the opinion transformation per se. Indeed, the model of human-to-human interactivity is based on the fundamental idea that the opinion preference transformation has a direct and significant relation with the online information discourse. In other words, we could say that one of the main reasons for participants forming and changing their opinions is that they have been influenced by different opinions through online deliberation. This could be argued because the public discourse is not the only information environment cultivated by the deliberation of participants as information offers. It also includes other third parties such as some websites as information sources, or controlled forums which have a moderator for regulating participants' comments to an extent (Ferber et al., 2007). In this case, one could argue the opinion transformation in online environment cannot simply be understood only under the framework of deliberation, even though it happens during the process of deliberation. Indeed, if we cannot further draw a clear line between the influence participants get from inside and outside the deliberation system, it may directly damage the validity of this model. However, if we see online forums not as communicative platforms facilitating the flow of information, but a form of deliberation, the focus has been shifted from studying online deliberative media to online deliberation. It is to say, we can take an approach by focusing more on the participants, or more specifically the specific group of participants identified by the context of public online forum deliberation. Only when they enter the forum reading messages, posting, commenting or replying, they become part of the process, contributing to deliberation, and thus the object of the study. From a moral perspective, the behavioral significance of opinion changing here is more valued than its role in understanding the interactivity on the information level.

3.4.2.2.3 Detecting the possible online moral phenomena: The analytic target

Therefore, I randomly selected five cases from the total of 9 sample cases to use as material for analysing online interactive relationships in the moral sense. By "case" I mean, for deliberations that take place on online forums, a deliberation that usually starts with a topic-centred post, which I call a topic post. This can be long or short, and contain certain discursive information; for example, opinion-directed information, or second-hand analytical information. A hot topic post is usually followed by a good number of replies that discuss the topic. The topic poster can reply to any of the replies below their original post, creating a deliberation between two or more people. The same is true for the other participants. In this way, an interactive deliberation network is formed, consisting of posts and replies. So, even though I can see replies from all kinds of perspectives, and including a lot of different focus points and knowledge, they are mostly related in one way or another, and generally discuss the main topic in the original post. An original topic post and all the replies beneath I define as a "case". So, the five cases included here are five topic themed posts with all their branch comments and replies down below.

However, I had to make a choice from all the opinion groups to research online moral behaviour. I first decided to focus mainly on the simple opinion groups for three reasons. First, shown in Table 4, the role they play in all interactive relationships is comparatively simpler than that of the evidential groups, as they were the groups that were mostly influenced by other opinion groups in online deliberation. This enables us to compare the extent of interaction within groups with the same pattern of interaction. Secondly, if I had evidential groups as the analysis subject, it would be difficult to measure the influence of online evidential opinion messages on those who expressed evidential opinions, and especially mutual influence within the same opinion group. Thirdly, most of the participants I interviewed, as I call them “quiet participants” were simple opinion expressers. It made sense for me to be consistent by focussing on the same kind of opinions in both the online groups and the interviews.

Further, I targeted the simple opinion group that was in the majority (the simple opinion group that was in the mainstream opinion camp), to look for moral values in interactions between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. Simple opinion expressers in the mainstream opinion camp are influenced by evidential opinions from the same opinion camp as well as by different opinions, including simple and evidential opinions, from the other opinion camp in deliberation. So, I compared the extent of interaction between these two relationships. In fact, in this case,

the majority evidential opinion group played a double role, as both evidential opinion expressers, and as the majority. This means that, if we targeted the simple opinion group in the minority (namely the non-mainstream opinion group), and found that its interaction with the majority opinion expressers was stronger than with the minority evidential opinion group, it would be hard to tell if this was due to a lack of moral values in deliberation, or because the dominant influence of the majority opinion group was greater because of its advantages in numbers or maybe because group members offered more effective information. By targeting the majority simple opinion group, however, I can avoid such confusion, because two features of the majority evidential group - evidential and majority, could both be reasons why this group had the greatest influence on the majority simple opinion group. However, if it is found that the simple opinion group had more intense interaction with the minority opinion group than with the majority evidential opinion group in the same opinion camp, we could say there is reason to believe that moral values played a part in the deliberation to some extent.

To detect moral values in interactions between the majority and minority groups, I targeted the simple opinion group in the minority group, namely the non-mainstream opinion camp. As I discovered in the interviews, for individuals who did not already hold firm and sound opinions, majority opinions had greater influence on the formation of their opinions. However, for those with clear opinions in the first place, especially when they are opinion holders in the minority group, the influence of the majority opinions might be more likely to cause bad consequences, such as marginalization of expression and opinion suppression. In that sense, even a greater degree of interaction between the minority opinion group and the majority opinion group may not always be a sign that moral values were present. Instead, intense interaction within the minority opinion camp, namely between those who hold simple minority opinions and those who hold evidential minority opinions, could be a sign of the existence of moral values in a deliberation. As I discussed earlier, a good deliberation is expected to balance the power between participant camps, so as not to overwhelm the ability of people on either side to communicate their opinions effectively. In the online case, this was always seen in the majority influence. Thus, minority influence could be used as an indication, at least in the moral sense, to assess whether a discussion is deliberatively successful. Consistency is key here. As some scholars have noticed, minority influence only has a good chance if members of a minority group stand together, and remain consistent (Wood et al., 1994). The more insistent and less compromising they are, the greater the potential influence of their minority opinions (Moscovici, 1980). Therefore, based on this sort of deliberative setting, if the minority (in this

case, the minority simple opinion group) has more intense interaction with those who hold minority evidential opinions from the same opinion camp, it may be that moral values do play a role in deliberation to some extent.

3.4.2.2.4 Considering the dialogic nature of human beings in deliberative relationships

To approach moral meaning in the interview materials, the study mainly focused on the dialogic features of ordinary Chinese participants, especially those quiet participants who engage in online deliberation via non-written forms of expression. To detect a moral sense, I used the point at which divergences emerged in deliberative talk as our starting point, and analysed their causes, including the attitudes, thoughts, feelings, reactions and reasons behind communicative behaviour. By understanding people's thoughts and feelings and the way they deal with divergence, we tried to build an interpretative account of moral meaning, especially that which was at the root of non-textual expressive behaviours. We assumed that some thoughts and behaviours could be explained well by looking at certain aspects of Chinese social culture, norms and cultural communicative concepts. Some others have changed but can still be associated with Chinese social and cultural features, and be interpreted by situating them within the Chinese communicative context. By investigating the dialogic features of participants in their most natural daily conversational state, we were not only able to summarize the typical pattern among Chinese people engaging in online deliberation, but also to understand the moral intuition embodied in their online participation activities, including those who were inactive, for example using simple expression and dropping-out, and the non-textual forms of expression, such as liking, sharing, clicking and viewing.

Interview Questions (Appendix 1)

Main Questions	Further Questions	Clarifying Questions
What do you think deliberation is? And why?	• Have you discussed something with people online? • What do you think deliberation is in an offline environment? • What do you think online deliberation is? • What kind of activities can be included in online deliberation for you?	Can you expand a little on this? Do you have anything else to tell me?

	• What activities do you do when you deliberate with people in an offline environment?	Can you give me some examples?
How do you usually form your opinions in an online environment?	• What usually makes you interested in some topics? • What kind of topics are you usually interested online? • What do you usually do when you are interested in certain topics? • When do you feel you want to discuss it with people? why? • How do you usually get involved in an online discussion? Why? • How is it different from what you do in the offline environment?	Can you expand a little on this? Do you have anything else to tell me? Can you give me some examples?
How do you usually express your opinions online?	• What kind of information do you prefer to use in support of your opinions? Why? • How do you usually get that information? Why you choose it in that way? • How would you like to use that information? Why? • Are there any factors you consider influential for information usage? What are they? And why? • Which do you prefer? Online expression or offline expression in deliberation?	Can you expand a little on this? Do you have anything else to tell me? Can you give me some examples?
How do you usually deal with divergence in online deliberation?	• What is your first reaction on any divergence, conflict appearing in online deliberation? Why? • Are there influential factors you have to consider for taking reaction differently? What are they? And why? • Would you take any way to avoid conflict in deliberation? When? And why? • What do you think divergence in deliberation means to you?	Can you expand a little on this? Do you have anything else to tell me? Can you give me some examples?
	• In most online deliberations you have experienced before, do you	

How do you think about the relationship you have/build with your talk partner during the deliberation?	have some sort of positive relationship with the people at the end, or not? Why? • What kind of people you think can be defined as a good deliberator? Why? • Based on your past deliberation experience, what do you think a successfully deliberation looks like? • Why do you think it can be successful? • Has such successful experience happened to you a lot? Why?	Can you expand a little on this? Do you have anything else to tell me? Can you give me some examples?
What do you think you have learned from online deliberation? Why?	• How do most of your online deliberations end up? Why? • What kind of ending to a deliberation do you think you would be satisfied with? Why? • Have you changed in any sense because of a deliberation? What have you changed? And how? • What do you think about digression in the process of deliberation? Why? • Have you digressed in the process of deliberation? How often? How did you digress and why? • Are there any differences you have noticed between online and offline deliberation? What are they? How do you feel about them?	Can you expand a little on this? Do you have anything else to tell me? Can you give me some examples?

Chapter IV The Chinese context and online communicative settings for talking about online deliberation on the cognitive Level

In this chapter, we outline the basic cultural and social background of the Chinese style of expression, mainly related to the management of information in communication. For this purpose, the study took two social and cultural concepts which have largely shaped and influenced Chinese expressive behaviours and thinking through the ages. This will be useful for later analysis at the cognitive level, by giving a general idea of the Chinese style of expression in the traditional sense. Based on this, we also discuss here three characteristics of the online communicative setting related to deliberation in forums: anonymity, information overload and asynchronicity, as a basis for discussion of how such online communicative environments and settings have changed the behaviours and thinking of people in communication. Although in this chapter we have reviewed some relevant literature, a more complete answer is needed, based on the interpretative study of Chinese online deliberation practices. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to heighten attention, offering an entry point for the development of our analysis in the next chapter by asking the question: to what extent, and how, have such online communicative settings changed the expressive pattern of Chinese people that is rooted in Chinese communicative culture and social traditions, such as the Chinese modesty and face cultures? More importantly, how will those changes help us to further understand the new online communicative behaviours, the communicative thinking of Chinese people, and its consequences from a cognitive perspective in account of deliberation?

4.1 The Chinese social culture of expression

4.1.1 The Chinese concept of modesty

The reason for talking about modesty here is that it is closely related to the Chinese style of expression. It not only affects what kind of information people give in communication, but also to the substantial meaning and values behind certain expressions. Compared with the western communicative pattern, the Chinese version is not quite as direct and straightforward. If you have not any experience of dealing with Chinese people, some simple examples may give you a sense of the way they communicate. For example, sometimes when Chinese people admit that they do not know something well, it does not mean they really know very little about it. When they avoid talking about their achievement, it does not mean they think it is not worth your attention. In fact, such contradictory expression is the creation of traditional Chinese communicative culture – it is an example of Chinese modesty. This has largely shaped the

expressive thinking of Chinese people, further determining their expressive behaviours and language.

The modesty concept originates in the Chinese understanding of social status. In 'Dao De Jing', Laozi gave his attitude to eusocial status as, *"贵以贱为本，高以下为基"*（Laozi, 2010: 20). It means 'humble is the basis for considering people as noble'. People cannot be noble if they lack humility. This view is widely discussed in the context of the relationship between the emperor and his civilians. From Laozi's point of view, people who have achieved success, and won recognition are usually intimidating for others. In that case, if they do not learn how to appreciate other people's respect, instead of having too high an opinion of themselves, they will inevitably end up as a loner with no support. Therefore, the more talented people are, the higher their position, the more power, greater reputation and success they have, the more particular attention they should pay to disadvantaged others. That is to say, they should make a humble gesture first, gaining recognition and acceptance by being just as "normal" as everyone else. Furthermore, once you feel fulfilled, and have accomplished everything you set out to do, Laozi advocates retirement from the world. He explains that fame and wealth, and the means to live easily, will make you a target of public criticism. In that sense, a person who knows how to protect themselves knows how to drop back, especially at optimum. This is not the mark of a weak or escapist mind, but of the achievement of a greater 'unworldly' morality, embodying a humble, modest and polite way of doing things.

Furthermore, the concept also originated in the traditional Chinese attitude to honour and disgrace. In Chapter 44 of Dao De Jing, Laozi discussed his views on choosing between fame and life. Whereupon, he educated people to hold an attitude of indifference to fame and wealth, and know where and when to draw the line. He pointed out that an obsession with the pursuit of wealth and fame will be certainly followed by an even bigger loss. The way to truly recognise fame and wealth, he considered, is "故知足不辱，知止不殆，可以长久" (Laozi, 2010: 22). This means only people who are content with their lot will never feel shame about loss, because they always know where to stop. For that reason, they can have lasting peace. Not only are the Chinese educated to be indifferent to fame and wealth, but such a concept even demands that they avoid the desire for it in the first place. It explains that people only feel frustrated if they are lost in the obsession of pursuing success. Only when individuals become less profit-driven, will they enjoy a sense of self-sufficiency by recognising that they have got what they

have been pursuing. This is the so-called spirit of desiring nothing and doing "nothing". It appreciates the whole process without intervention, and considers human intervention equivalent to human destruction. In that sense, honour and disgrace are only worldly possessions. To be truly human, people are not encouraged to pursue such things. Vanity works against the rules of nature and will endanger one both physically and mentally.

This is the one of the most important traditional concepts guiding the behaviour of the Chinese in the face of divergence. When it comes to disagreement, the Chinese are educated to follow the basic principle of "rectitude" in the context of conflict, being well-behaved by etiquette. Ideally, for the common good, people are taught to how deflect anger and discontent into inner peace. That is, not only negative feelings, such as anger and upset, but any kind of emotion can be normalised by etiquette. Confucius took love between men and women as an example, said "发乎情，止乎礼". It means that the romantic affection that grows between men and women should be confined to rituals. Such stipulations are set to help create a more harmonious relationship as a foundation, in particular for dealing with conflict. As a result, Chinese people would much prefer to make a positive impression in a situation of conflict - to be considered well-mannered by controlling their feelings and keeping a low profile in front of others. Such strategies are explained by Laozi (2010) as "弱者，道之用" (p. 20), meaning that one can safeguard against or resolve conflicts by showing a gesture of weakness. In his opinion, it is the optimal way to gain respect and a winning move in conflict situations. It is thought that resistance to a condescending gesture of authority that blames others in a situation of conflict is natural. So, to avoid actual disharmony, Laozi (2010) taught people "不自见，故明" (p. 12), which means that a person's value will only be appreciated if they do not sell themselves on their contributions and achievements. At the same time, being humble, showing a gesture of weakness will also earn a sense of guilt from others, evoking their consideration on the basis of the common good.

Therefore, the Chinese concept of modesty has deeply shaped the way that people express themselves, including making mediocrity out of achievement, concession out of honour and making tolerance a virtue. The modesty concept not only influences negative expression in the context of conflict, but also positive expression in daily communication. Taking the positive expression of happiness, honour and achievement for example: trying to be modest, the Chinese would rather be playing at mediocrity than actively sharing these emotions with others, because

sharing such information would promote suspicions of self-aggrandisement. When people fail to live up to moral expectation, positive expression loses its sense and any accomplishment is not recognised. Therefore, the positive expression of individual fulfilment is not encouraged by Chinese culture. The only way to make others admire, recognise and appreciate your success is, on the contrary, by showing an "ordinary" side, hiding one's capability and keeping a low profile. This is usually what one is expected to deliver. This mode of expression is especially conspicuous in public communication with strangers. In general, even though a topic may be very familiar to someone who is offering their professional opinion, for example, they would be very cautious about sharing too much of their personal opinion along with other information, or taking the chance to impress others. Rather, they would be expected to be humble, even self-deprecating, to make an impression of modesty. In some sense, this is an even more crucially important social code for Chinese people in their daily communicative lives, to meet the expectation of expression in a moral sense rather than making a show of their real capability.

Speaking of negative expression, the modesty concept plays a greater role in shaping a kind of introverted and conservative style of Chinese expression. The connotations of Chinese modesty include an emphasis on cultivating self-discipline and tolerance. People should value tolerance over the facts of the matter – whether something is right or wrong *per se*. As a result, the Chinese pay much more attention to a conciliatory attitude rather than the reasons for settling an argument. Therefore, expressing negative thoughts is not constructive in a situation of conflict, because of the negative consequences it can bring to the communication, for example, the emotional charge caused by a negative response such as rejection, or impulsive action. To avoid the high price of such expression, modesty requires the Chinese to pay more attention to their own behaviours rather than others'. Rather than addressing a problem directly, people are trained in the spiritual cultivation of morality, rationality and tolerance, for example, to create the potential for a harmonious environment which is considered to be the precondition for, and foundation of, problem-solving. In Chinese culture, such training is also seen a practice and a test. The intention is to build a better deliberator in the Chinese sense, someone who knows how to tolerate and compromise in conflicts. Personality takes priority and in that sense, one can "win" bigger bargaining chips in other people's eyes. However, self-expression tends to be less important, and can even be considered as "*Zao Zuo*" (造作 in Chinese), which means desires and secularity that disturb freedom and happiness. If staying in an argument does not really make you win, dropping out does not really make you lose, and expression in argument

has then lost most of its meaning. The truth exists, no matter whether or not it is spoken. So, when confronting conflict, what matters more to the Chinese mind is a harmonious atmosphere, rather than the substance of the problems that need to be solved. In this way, Chinese people are taught that the best approach to disagreement and conflict is to display humility/weakness to avoid an unpleasant argument. They are also required to engage in a high degree of self-reflection, and observe the rules of etiquette. This significantly reduces both the quantity and quality of negativity in communication.

4.1.2 Lian and Mianzi: Chinese "face" culture

The Chinese culture of "face", as many related studies point out, has certain social implications. According to Zhai's (2011) understanding, it is more likely to be interpreted as a behavioral expression or impression. He understands Chinese "face" as a social behaviour, or as a mask, in the Chinese sense. To distinguish this from the western understanding of mask, it is firstly related to the identity and status of people who play their roles in social activity. Moreover, its function is more for visibility than disguise, which also endows this concept with a sense of power, status and reputation in Chinese communication. As a result, some scholars further understand "face" through Chinese-style relationship status (Zhai, 2011; Earley, 1997), considering it is not an image built by oneself alone. Rather, it is embodied in a mutual communication pattern in which face needs to be preserved, maintained and protected through communicative interactions based on relevant responses and the reactions of other people. Take "face-giving" (给面子 in Chinese) as an example, which is a typical consideration in Chinese social interaction. This shows a kind of personal bond between the individuals in communication, with sentimental values involved, and consideration of each other's social status or authority.

Meanwhile, "face" also reveals strong moral implications. In Huwang's (1997) understanding, the concept can be different from what Chinese people call "Mianzi" ("Chinese face" in Chinese) in daily social occasion. Mianzi can be considered as one's performance, while face refers to one's moral conduct (Huang, 1997). In some cases, they can be treated as two independent ideas, but are not always consistent with one another (Huang,1997; Hu, 1994). People may earn Mianzi, through a good performance given by inappropriate means. For example, it is common to see people who want to earn Mianzi at the cost of distorting the facts in an argument. In this case, the risk would be that moral "face" is questionable. In Confucian culture, particularly, the idea of face carries a very strong moral meaning. In western

understanding, the failure of a mask could only mean making oneself foolish (Zhai, 2011). In the Confucian value system, on the other hand, people are expected to set a good example of moral principle and protocol standards, especially those who are in high office. That is, the higher status and reputation one enjoys, the more power and resources they possess, the greater the weight of the moral expectations of other people and society in general they have to bear. Only when they match up to moral expectations can their achievement and honor be recognised and accepted, and their "face" value formed and functioning (Hu, 2004). Therefore, in the Chinese mind, to lose one's face is not as simple as making fool of oneself. More importantly, it means the negation of someone in the sense of propriety and morality.

As a communicative behaviour, the construction of face is not quite as simple as shaping one's image in Chinese communication. It involves a two-way interactive process between the sense of "face" and the expressive behavior. In Zhai's study, it is described as a well-planned and orderly process. Firstly, Chinese people will visualise an idealised self-image they want to show in front of others. This is considered to be the beginning of a sense of "face" formed in the mind (Zhai, 2011). After this, they formulate expectations about how other people, as their audience, will react on such image (Zhai, 2011). This is the emergence of "face", that involves both psychological and emotional factors. In the process of building one's face, the communicative behaviour of the Chinese is more likely to be managed through self-assessment, which is oriented towards other people's opinions (Zhai, 2011; Zhang and Si, 2010; Li, 2001; Bao and Zhao, 2009). Influenced by opinions, people have to build a connection with others, and perceptions of self (such as shame, self-esteem, arrogance and self-abasement) are produced at the same time (Wang and Hou, 2005). These emotions lead to a series of reactions that causes them to earn, maintain or save face in action (Zhai, 2011). Furthermore, Zhu and Yang (1988) considered that "face" is the one of the most social principal inducing factors which influence the social behaviours of Chinese people in communicative life. She concluded that once people feel their face is threatened, they try to ascertain the source of the threat in the situation, other individuals and behaviours. This is a process in which a series of psychological changes are produced that determine the nature of further communicative action in an interaction, for example self-presentation, flattery, criticism, prioritising-decorum, or capability-strengthening (Zhu and Yang, 1988) (see details in Diagram 1).

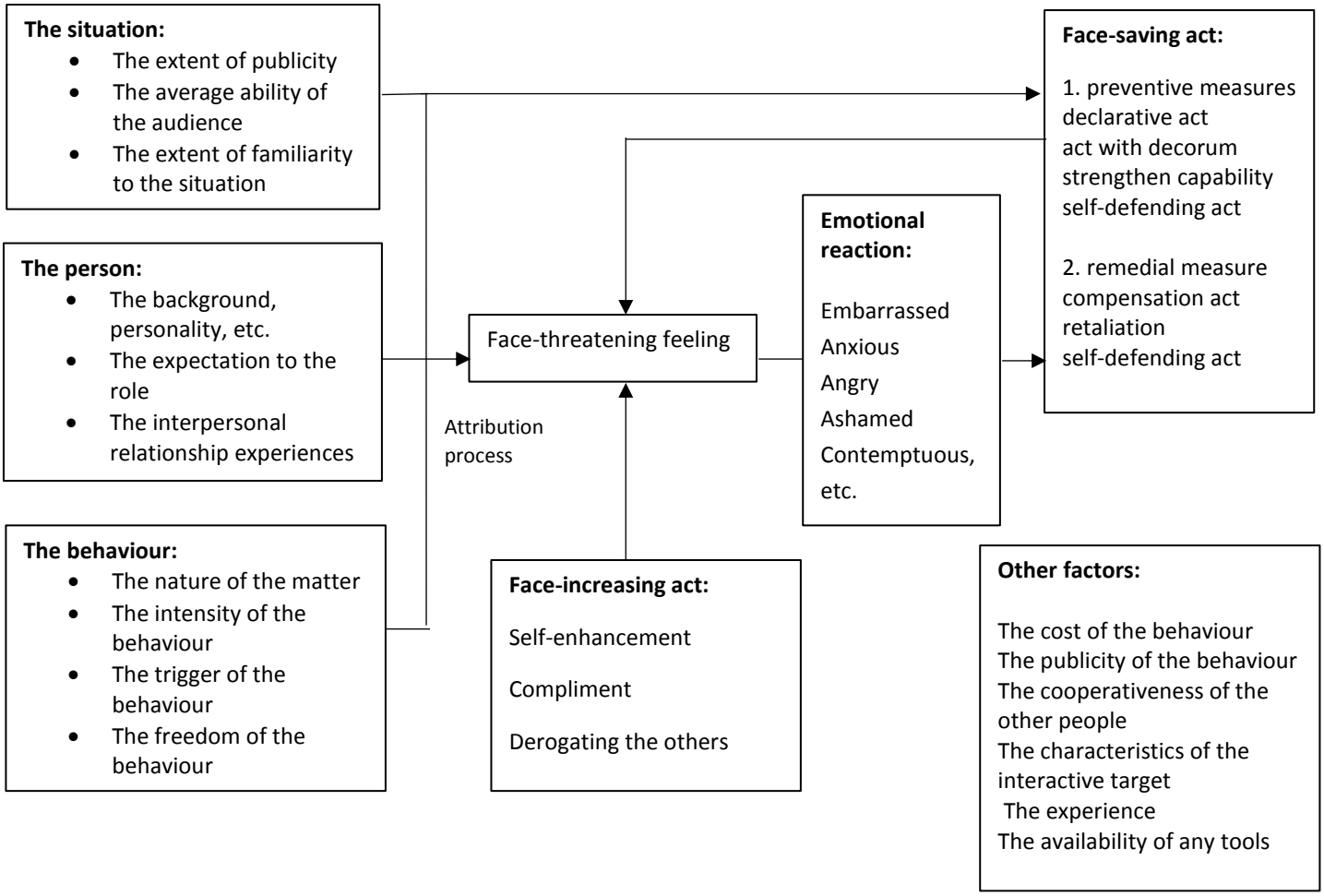
One of the ways we can understand the role that "face" plays in the Chinese communicative style, therefore, is to figure out the connection between a series of psychological activities

caused by “face” and later expressive behaviours in interaction. Here, we can borrow some ideas from Goffman to understand the connection. In face-to-face offline settings, Goffman (1990) considered, the other’s response is usually unknown, or at least an uncertain factor for the expresser. As a result, expressers can only build up an impression by what Goffman (1990) defined as the "giving" process, mainly with verbal symbols, based on their own judgement of what they learn from the communication. It can be intentional and managed in this sense. On the other hand, individuals do not always plan out in advance the way they want to act, and sometimes only involuntarily express themselves (Goffman, 1990). Such a process is considered to involve a wider range of action, which is defined as "given off" by Goffman (1990). It can be unintentional in a sense that the expressive behaviours are separate from the information conveyed in the communication, but other reasons, for example past social experience, social status, a group’s communication, or the influence of traditional customs. However, effective image management requires people to shape their image based on the expectation of others, namely, to be consistent with the other's expectation. However, because of the uncertainty and unpredictability of the reaction of others, deviations and mistakes may appear in image management in terms of the self's subjective judgement. In other words, some wrong assumptions may be made about the reaction of others, and taken as the expectations on which expressers attempt to build their image. In a western context, this is comparable to “face”-making in the Chinese sense, and expressive behaviours are only appreciated when the “give” is consistent with what is “given off” (Zhai, 2011).

However, the process of face-forming presents some differences in the Chinese context. As we have already discussed, traditional Chinese communicative culture and principles of modesty require people to see mediocrity as achievement, concession as honor and tolerance as a virtue. In reality, however, such symbolic activities cannot gain a return in the short term. That is to say, the modesty principle is usually recognised more by one’s style of people handling over the long-term, rather than derived from just a single instance of mediocre, conceding and compromising behaviour. In fact, such behaviours alone, in the short term, do not fairly distinguish you in practice from those who are good for nothing. At this point, as Goffman (1990) incisively observed “In most stratified societies there is an idealization of the higher strata and some aspiration on the part of those in low places to move to higher ones.” (P. 45). The gap, or contradiction, between cultural teaching and the reality, causes the dissimilarity between face-understanding and related expressive behaviours, which is understood as theatrical performance (Goffman, 1990). Entire theatrical activities involve planning,

performing and interacting. Neither the play nor the acting is necessarily real. The only thing important for actors is to win over the audience with their performance.

Diagram 1: The process of Chinese face-creating and -grooming (Zhu, 1988)



Just like a stage performance, the process of "face" establishment is not a simple one-way process, or about only meeting the expectation of the audience. On stage, the actors not only focus on performing, but also need to set the scene for their audiences through acting, creating recognition, and rendering the emotions echoed by the performance, so the audience can be led into the setting, or at least compelled by a kind of entering-urge. In that way, the performance can even go beyond the expectation of audiences. In that case, such a performance (a metaphor for image) can create face value (or what we call "face-earning" in the Chinese context). To surpass expectations, people use all kinds of resources and strategies, working on the grandeur of performance, sometimes at the cost of the essence, and even of moral standards.

At this point, we arrive at a better understanding of Zhai's work on the "contradiction" present in Chinese expressive behaviours for building "face". He constructed a system, including verbal and behavioural expressions, to explain the typical performance of Chinese people to earn face. According to his observations, the most efficient and appreciated way of earning face is when people's verbal expression is inconsistent with their behavioural expression, particularly worse than one's behaviours (Zhai, 2011). In other words, Chinese are taught to follow the teachings of modesty. It is a social rule that one must fulfil the audience's expectation of the modesty standard in order for the communication to be effective. As a result, negative verbal expression is much preferred in the good performance of a role. This can also lay down the expectation of the audience in some way, preparing a favorable foundation in case of either remedy or expectation-exceeding actions later. In actions, the aim is to put on a magnificent performance to match, or surpass the expectation of the "audience". In this setting, there may be two kinds of result in practice, since it makes no substantial difference if the words are already negative but just not as "bad" as the later action. That is to say, if verbal expression is done in a negative way, even though it is better compared to the later actions, the performance is still in accord with the expectation in a negative sense. People will at least not suffer loss of face, and also will meet the requirement of modesty. Alternatively, where action is actually better than it is verbally claimed to be (when the performance is beyond the audience's expectation), people will both earn face and be appreciated morally. This strategy aims to achieve the effect that Goffman (1990) describe thus: "Those who have the time and talent to perform a task well may not, because of this, have the time or talent to make it apparent that they are performing well" (p. 43). So, in the Chinese mind, as long as people keep a low profile in words, no matter what performance they deliver in actions, it is not considered to be a big failure in terms of losing face.

However, the situation can be totally different when verbal behaviours are too ostentatious. For example, someone who claims to be a good piano player, which could raise the expectations of the audience too much. In that case, the task of going beyond the expectation may not be so easy. The only difference is that such behaviour can be used as another strategy in Chinese communication, known as "Chong Mianzi", in which the aim is to pretend to be good to earn face (Zhai, 2011). Everyone is aware that things are easier said than done. This may result in a polished rhetorical performance in some cases where people create more highly visualised productions that Goffman called "dramatic realization". This is image-building using signs – in this case verbal signs, preferentially chosen by people to highlight the character they prefer

to show in front of others (Goffman, 1990). However, if face work is only easily done by word-performing, rather than with real ability and with effort put in behind the scenes, there will be a risk that it leads to a disappointing failure in later performance in the sense of not being able to fulfill the expectation built up by one's words. For that reason, it is usually only used as an expedient to illuminate one's face image. In this case, to make it earn or at least not lose face, people have to find ways to avoid the later performance. Once they are detected, not only can it cause loss of face, but it also courts a negative impression in terms of both ability level and morality. However, it is exactly because of this that desperation drives people to take the risk, hiding their duplicity even so far as to cross the moral line. Until they are caught out, they can be blame-free. This is thus appreciated as a short cut, in the business of face-earning and -saving.

4.2 Online deliberative settings

Noelle-Neumann (1974) defines public opinion as opinions that people feel free to express in public without worrying about social isolation. This definition clearly suggests the extent to which people weight others' opinions when come to public expression. On this point, some researchers have pointed out that the setting of an online communicative environment also has a critical influence on online opinion expression in public, just as in the offline environment (for example, Hampton et.al., 2014). In particular, the internet has largely changed both the communicative setting and the way in which people express themselves and interact with others. For example, they may only "like" or share information to express their supportive opinions. Also, some expressive activities, like anonymous short comments, activate people to "speak out" without taking too much responsibility or risking possible social consequences (see Glynn et.al., 1997 for example). Based on that, to understand online deliberation, we should also take its setting into account, being aware of the difference for deliberation of aspects of information expression and management in the new communicative setting.

Considering the design of online forums, one characteristic of online communication is anonymity. Users do not usually use their real identity in forums, but unlike other social networks, they have to register to engage in deliberation, and accessing all the posts and replies. A forum allows an unlimited number of registered users. They can browse or post any topic, or reply to any comments including the original post and any other replies, meaning that they can choose anyone they want to communicate with. Secondly, online forum users can manage information more autonomically than ever. Compared to other social networks such as WeChat

and microblogs, an online forum is a more public and open virtual sphere for information exchange. Users do not have their own private space and domain name to modify settings or authorise connections, which makes people as deliberation participants equal enough to share all information available. Users can react to any information they choose, by means of liking, sharing, recommending or ignoring, which has a great impact on information transmission. Moreover, the communication effect is also influenced by time. The post-reply style of communication does not offer instant responses and the content is not ephemeral. Over time, a user's attitude, opinions, or information, for example, or the topic of the thread itself, may change in one way or another. It can be the case that people reply, comment or post multiple times during an event whenever they have something more to say. In theory, information in the communication should increase over time, but there are drawbacks to this format, too. For example, people may lose interest because of the delay in getting a response, a topic may become less popular, or of less significance for discussion, or get replaced by other 'hot' topics. In that case, the discussion will reach a point where it does not provide any more information and thus come to an end. Below, I discuss these characteristics of online settings, under the headings, anonymity, information overload, and asynchronicity.

4.2.1 Anonymity

Traditionally, anonymity is recognised as the inability of others to identify an individual (Christopherson, 2006). However, in a computer-mediated communicative environment, there are typically two categories: technical anonymity and social anonymity (Hayne and Rice, 1997). Technical anonymity basically refers to the elimination of all identifying information in communication. In an online communicative environment, this could be, for example, their name, age, or other identifying information. However, it is hard to say that people do not have an identity online, or that their online identity is completely unidentifiable. As we know, in online forum deliberation, it is still possible to track someone's IP address with networking technology, but the online setting does normally allow people to hide most or part of their identifying information in communication with each other. Social anonymity, by contrast, refers to a situation in which someone cannot be identified or sensed by others, due to a lack of the information necessary to recognise their identity. In that sense, anonymity barely exists in a social context. That is to say, even though you hide away your real identity information, virtual information will eventually create another identity through which people can identify "you". Therefore, internet users cannot be fully anonymous in a real sense.

Some researchers have pointed out that the association between anonymity and online expression is one approach to understanding online human behaviours. For example, Suler (2004) suggests that anonymity enables people to separate their behaviour from their social identity. Separation helps people avoid a series of social consequences related to identity, which protects them against their own weaknesses, and some extent encourages people to greater disclosure. This is especially important when we talk about behaviour that expresses different or polarised opinions. The disconnection created by anonymity from the "real" self may melt away the worries and concerns about behaviour done by a responsible "YOU", transforming responsibility morally and psychologically through perceiving that it is not "me" doing it (Suler, 2004). Psychological consequences of anonymity involve freedom from the fear of possible social consequences, and an extreme sense of freedom for people especially when people are experiencing something new(Christopherson, 2007), which is considered to be the factor that may encourage a willingness and ability to express in every sense: emotionally, verbally and behaviourally (for example, Derlega and Chaikin, 1977; McKenna and Bargh, 1998; McKenna and Bargh, 2000; McKenna et al., 2002). However, other findings discuss expressive behaviour in group communications, and some scholars have noticed that anonymity is also responsible for some phenomena, such as information free-riders (Wang and Lai, 2006), social loafing (Shiue et.al., 2010), false and misleading information (Dreyfus, 1999), cyber violence (Coffey and Woolworth, 2004) and minority influence (Spears et.al., 2002). These are considered to be the consequences of the strategic use of anonymity in online communication for self-interest (Spears and Lea, 1994).

4.2.2 Information overload

A significant contribution of the internet is to make information-sharing possible. In a traditional sense, information is for giving but not for sharing. In economics, information is recognised as a public good and also as a proprietary good. The value of information is mainly embodied in the value of experience. That is to say, people will pay for experience as both a service and a product (Rafaeli and Raban, 2005). This also applies to the information business. For example, in journalism, the value of information lies in offering it. The key difference is between "the informer" and "the informed" (Jones et.al., 2004). In the past, the main reason why particular news caught people's attention at any given moment is that the information was a paid experience, and not freely available at any time (Dreyfus 1999). In the internet age, however, information is abundant and freely available, which further blurs the boundary between information and knowledge. Compared to a time when information was only collected,

stored and transmitted on paper, this is a world without order. Everyone can become an information taker, and an information provider at the same time. We could all visit as many websites as possible, but have various criteria for deciding which information is more significant, because "nothing is so important that it demands a special place" when "all qualitative distinctions are, indeed, being levelled" online (Dreyfus, 1999: 16). Even people's interest is not a reliable criterion for helping us decide, since information overload makes everything either equally interesting or equally boring. A large amount of unqualified information creates "data smog" (Shenk, 1997). Information has to cross a line to stand out, earning attention (Oppenheim, 1997). With people caring less and less, information is gradually losing its value.

Speaking at the level of expression, one of the direct consequences of information overload is that individuals are no longer able to respond properly to online communication (Chan, 2001). For an interaction to function as communication in an offline face-to-face model, information exchange is necessary. People need to consistently engage in communicative interaction with one another, investing effort in building and maintaining a kind of communicative relationship with other people. However, people have a limited number of hours and a limited amount of energy, and become exhausted, even in an offline setting. We can imagine how much more time and energy a person needs to properly engage in many-to-many online communication as in the one-to-one pattern of communication in the offline environment. Some studies show that, compared to the traditional single channel, people spend more time dealing with and managing intensive information flows with high posting frequency (for example Palme, 1995; Hiltz and Turoff, 1985). This can test people's limits, pushing them to try by all means to resist the consequences and discomfort caused by overload. Jones and Rafaeli (2004) listed seven responses of people faced with information overload: 1) to try harder, and learn more information management skills; 2) to fail in the interaction; 3) to copy similar responses; 4) to store information, not responding until time is available; 5) to give wrong responses; 6) to give no response/ or not to participate. Unless individuals actively want to disproportionately increase their communicative participation, the easiest way to handle the situation of having to process unlimited information with limited ability, would be to choose not to respond or not to participate at all.

4.2.3 Asynchronicity

An online forum, as an information board, features asynchronous interaction. Unlike offline face-to-face communication, most of the time people cannot expect a real-time interaction with each other through posting and replying. There could be a long gap between posting and getting a relevant response. Fishkin et al. (2005), commented on this characteristic, suggesting that it could lower the level of affective bonding between people, causing an environment not conducive to achieving mutual understanding. It has been referred to as a "monologue" by most deliberative democrats, as a "triumph" of the individual's desire (Jensen, 2003), because it fails to deliver the most basic expectation of voice – that of being heard and responded to considerately through communication (Freelon, 2010). However, for other researchers, this characteristic is seen to act as a stimulus, allowing people to engage more, and self-disclose without suffering the social pressure of exposure in the responses of others, and having to deal with the consequences (Suler, 2004).

Moreover, asynchronicity is also related to the information outcome in online discussions. For one thing, it is credited with producing high-quality discussion because there is more time to produce information-rich and thoughtful responses. In offline communications we are unlikely to be given much time to respond. However, computer-mediated communications make it possible for people to have time to think, and to research as long as they want before giving a response. As Coleman and Gotze (2001) pointed out, to achieve the best online deliberation, messages need to be gathered up, properly digested, and responded to, all of which requires readers' (participants') time. Asynchronicity, in this sense, tends to give people enough time for thinking and learning how to offer a better response (Wegerif, 1998; Ping et al., 2001). It has also been pointed out that online characteristics such as asynchronicity might moderate the social connection, which is the relational closeness built through social communication, and "compulsive internet use", which refers to the inability to control, reduce, or bring online behaviours to an end (Mazer and Ledbetter, 2012). It could indirectly demotivate active engagement, information contribution, and effective learning in online deliberation. Some studies of online learning have confirmed such concerns, by addressing the crucial role of response, and the interactivity it creates for the online forum style learning process (Black and William, 1998; Palloff and Pratt, 2005).

Chapter V. Analysing Online Deliberation on the Cognitive Level

In this chapter, the findings of the online deliberation in the Chinese context are presented at a cognitive level. The analysis was undertaken from two angles based on understanding the online deliberation as an information base. On one hand, the online data is considered as an established existence in the sense that all the information released during the deliberation process can be tracked and stored in online forum. As such, the online forum can be seen as a huge repository where the participants learn information from. On the other hand, such an information base is also created by online participants through deliberation. In that sense, by shifting the focus to the participants, the findings from the interview data analysis allow me to further develop what I have learned from the online materials by understanding their behaviours and thoughts related to deliberation. In other words, the online information environment can influence participants in a way to engage online deliberation. In return, how people behave deliberatively online (for example creatively or compulsively; textually or not), also create different impact on the quality and the quantity of the information delivered by the deliberation in online forum. In this chapter, by considering the Chinese context, I unfold the analysis and discussion from these two perspectives.

5.1 Online deliberation as an information base: The influence of participants to deliberation

In this section, I first present the findings of the online data. As deliberative theory discussed, online deliberation can be understood as an information base through which all participants can be influenced, learn and form opinions during the communicative process. From this aspect, I focused mainly on the influence that the online deliberative environment has to the participants, homophily and antagonism to be specific. By analysing the online posts and replies, the aim is to detect any possible relevant phenomena under the deliberation framework. To be able to offer a more comprehensive understanding, I then use the interview materials further explaining, criticizing and developing the findings from the online materials.

5.1.1 Focusing on homophily

5.1.1.1 Presentations and discussions of the online data

As deliberative theorists have suggested, difference of opinion may be the pre-condition for people engaging deliberation in the first place (Bohman, 1997; Young, 1997; Barabas, 2004). This seems not the case represented by the sample data. As what the statistics shows, there is a gap between supporting opinions and opposing ones (supporting messages vs. opposing

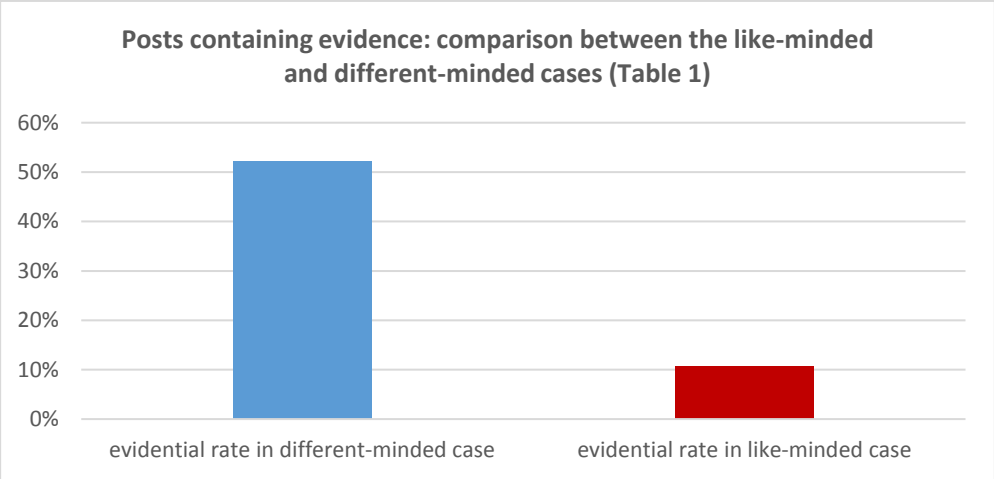
messages = 68: 32), which makes the online deliberative environment more likely a like-minded environment. However, the difference between these two types of messages is not dramatic. This made me wonder, unlike what deliberative theory presents, whether it was the like-minded opinion environment one of the reasons that made those deliberation topics attention-grabbing and information-rich in online settings.

Quickly I realised that there is one special case could be excluded with a deliberation-specific perspective. It is a post calling for transparency in use of the donations during and after the earthquake. What makes it so special is that there is a wide disparity in the proportions between supporting and oppositing messages. Because this proposal was so popular, it won the hearts of almost all the online participants (who expressed themselves in the writing style). In this case, the supporting messages account for 97% of the total, which created a mostly like-minded environment. According to the calculation, this is also selected and identified as a popular case, as the discussion lasted for a whole week with 74,860 views and 2,754 replies. As deliberative theorists have suggested, the reasoning process is considered the key to distinguish deliberation from other types of communication (Gutmann and Thompson, 2000; Bohman, 2000, Cohen, 2003). To make it a reasoning process to some extent, it requires a great deal of information with different perspectives and values, which also enables the creation of a strong information base from which participants can learn in the process of deliberation. If this case is not included for that reason, it will largely change the structure of the sample online messages. The radio between the supporting messages and the opposing ones can be changed to 47:53, which makes the sample deliberative environment more heterogeneous. This shows that, for online settings, different opinions may not necessarily the condition for a topic to attract more people engage in deliberation.

To better understand it, I made a comparison between the two sample collections each selected with the platform-specific perspective and the deliberation-specific one. As it shows from the deliberation-specific data sample, the proportion of evidential supporting messages and evidential opposing messages is almost the same, showing 13% and 10% each. Compared to the like-minded sample, however, the gap between the evidential supporting messages and the opposing ones is much more significant. Comparing the rates of evidential messages in Table 1 below, I have evidential messages divided by non-evidential messages in each sample collection of homophily and heterogeneity. The big difference between these two bars shows that the information created by reasoning process was largely suppressed in the like-minded

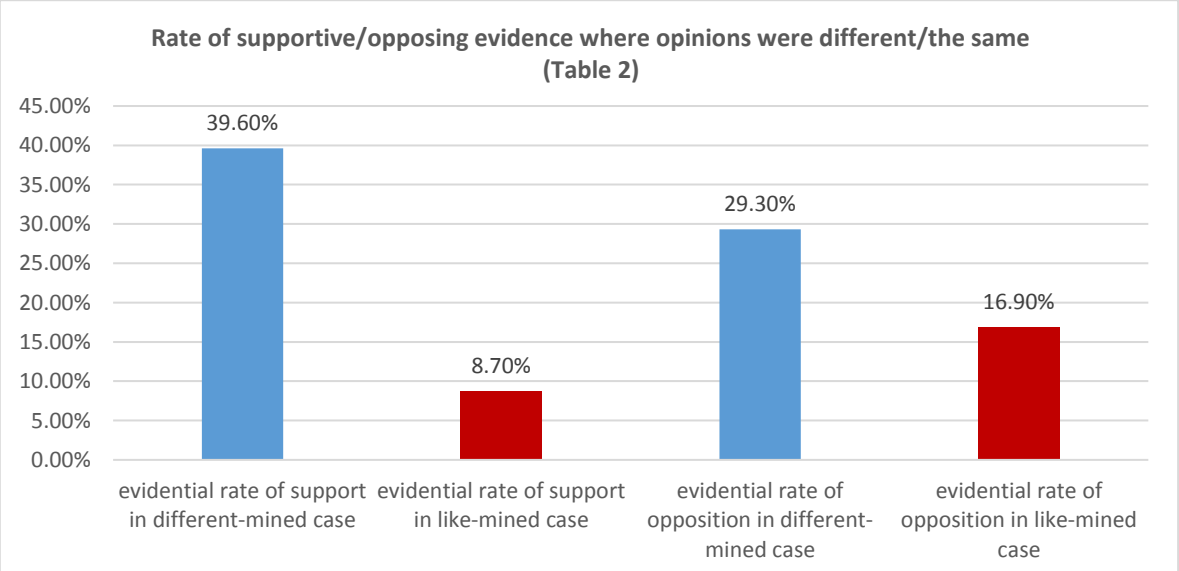
environment compared to the different-minded one, which could be the reason causing the direct decrease of the overall incremental information in deliberations. Taking a step further, I want to know if there is any evidence can be tracked from the online data showing how people are influenced in a more homogeneous environment, and in a less homogeneous one. For example, does a support-dominant deliberative environment have the same impact on the supporting opinion expressers as on the opposing opinion ones? In other word, I want to figure out if any possible correlation between different opinions, and if it results, or not, the incremental information increases in deliberation.

First of all, I noticed that, in both the case of homogeneous (87% supporting vs. 4% opposing) and antagonistic (13% supporting vs. 10% opposing), evidential supporting messages account for a larger proportion than the evidential opposing ones. This could point to the possibility that people are more likely to engage in a reasoning process online for expressing supporting opinions than opposing ones. Consequently, if it means that a more like-minded information environment could promote public engagement in online settings? Then what is the role of disagreement? Would it still be the driving force of deliberation, leading to information increment? or the opposite?



To collect more evidence, understanding the influence of different opinions in online deliberation, I further compared the proportion of messages containing supportive evidence and the proportion with oppositional evidence in the similar-opinion and difference-of-opinion threads. According to the coding, in the like-minded sample, there were 197 messages containing supporting evidence, and 10 that contained opposing evidence, out of totals of 2262 supporting and 59 oppositional messages overall. This meant that, in the like-minded thread,

the supporting messages containing evidence accounted for just 8.7% of all the supporting messages (197/2262*100%= 8.7%), while the number for opposing messages is 16.9% (10/59*100%= 16.9%). In the difference-of-opinion thread, there were 753 messages containing supporting evidence, and 622 with opposing evidence, among a total of 1899 supportive and 2122 opposition messages. According to the calculation, the proportion of messages with supporting evidence in the different-minded thread was 39.6% (753/1899* 100%= 39.6%), while the number of evidence containing opposing messages was 29.3% (622/2122*100%=29.3%). Thus as it shows in Table 2, that there were far fewer messages containing either supportive or oppositional evidence in an environment of similarity, but the decline in supportive evidence was more dramatic (at 18.5%), than the decline in messages containing oppositional evidence.



Therefore, some phenomena can be detected from online data that, when supportive opinions increased greatly to become the dominant opinions in a deliberation, far fewer items containing evidence were created from the support side, and this could make up the largest part of the overall information decrease in the entire thread. Meanwhile, however, the reduction in the number of posts containing supportive evidence seemed not to stop people expressing similar opinions online, except as I noticed in the coding process, most were simple supporting opinions. As Table 2 shows, even though opinions with evidence experienced a dramatic decline in the like-minded thread, evidential oppositions did not reduce as much as supportive evidential messages. In other words, evidential oppositions remained more stable comparing to evidential support. This may support that, different opinions, the opposing opinions in this

case, could still play an essential role of triggering and maintaining the vitality of online reasoning process to some extent. On the other side, the more dramatic decrease in supporting evidential messages may point to a possible conclusion that the reasoning process can be greatly weakened in a homogeneous environment for the absence of different opinions. Insufficient reasoning could lead to less information being added to a thread, as shown in this case where most messages were simple support without much evidential information included. This has seriously devalued the function of the deliberation as an information base from which participants can learn through engaging deliberatively.

Therefore, the evidences found in the online data analysis lead me to investigate more from the interview data to understand such homophily phenomenon and its influence on online participants as mainly quiet participants, specifically:

1. If the participants engaging online deliberation would more likely express themselves in a supportive way? How such way of opinion expression enhances, or not, to the online homogenous deliberative environment?
2. To what extent homophily can influence the participants expressing themselves online? For example, will it marginalize their expressive behavior as the minority? Does it have any relation with their opinion preference change? And if the opinion transformation leads the same impact as we found with online materials on the general information increment as an outcome of deliberation, which is the dramatic decline in evidential information offered by supporting opinion group?

5.1.1.2 A further discussion through interview analysis on the group of quiet participants

As the data I learned from the interviews is mainly based on, which according to the typologies in Brandtzag's (2010) study, the instrumental users and a few debaters (used to be), my aim in this section is to further investigate the interact between the homogeneous environment and the communicative behaviors of this participant group. Furthermore, I tried to develop a more in-depth understanding on this subject by approaching this group of people's communicative mind which plays the significant role in directing the behaviors. By doing that, I conduct the analysis by associating the phenomena with some relevant and contextual factors as the Chinese concept of modesty and the Chinese face culture that I have discussed in the last Chapter.

In this study, I have conducted the investigation based on the idea of seeing deliberation as a common, informal, conversational communicative activity of people's everyday life, and

identified several main elements from the answers that form the understanding of such deliberation concept: self-expression, divergence, information inquiry and improvement, relationship-building, enhancement of ability, persuasion, searching in common but preserving difference and consensus. For most participants, the deliberation which happens in daily basis can be equalled to some common communications happening in everyday life in forms of discussion, talk, chat and argument. In this case, people more likely engage in a casual and random way, and are more flexible about the result. Of all the factors, self-expression is the most mentioned one, which is claimed as necessary for deliberation by all the participants. More than half of the participants emphasized that deliberation is not about persuading people, but more to seek common points while preserving individual difference. Consequently, the majority of the participants see outcomes and experiences, such as acquiring information, opinion-formation and -improvement, as the main reason for engaging in deliberation rather than to achieve consensus. There are also plenty of them insisted that deliberation must be motivation-driven, for example, people deliberate when they feel to express their opinions, reveal their talent, solve problems, or to be recognized and accepted.

By approaching the definition with the Chinese mind, the interviews show that the idea of difference can be understood in the account of deliberation from three aspects. First, it is the Chinese attitude of reaching consensus in deliberative conversation. As I found out, consensus, in offline daily context, typically holds more instrumental value for people. Instead of seeing such communications as task-oriented, daily conversations are described as more casual and aimless. Opinions are gradually formed with the conversation being more and more profound. Although people discuss specific topics, there is no guarantee that they have a clear standpoint, or a well-developed opinion in any potential dispute. As a result, they are not usually prepared to persuade or to be persuaded by the others. For example, in the interviews, the majority of participants said that they would usually not prepare deliberately, for example knowing everything related to the topic before they engage the conversation. They could consistently agreed with other people just for maintaining a nice sociable atmosphere, rather than paying much attention on opinions in deliberation.

"You know I'm that kind of person who likes to entertain people. Like I used to talk with my friend and her sister a lot. They study economics, me sociology. In that case we may focus different things in the conversation. So most of time, the discussion is more like a social activity for bonding, having fun, encouraging interactivity. That's why I always try to go along with whatever they talk about. I engage with my opinion is just for maintaining the conversation you know. Plus, you don't want people think you are all about yourself, playing authority, showing off your knowledge or something." (Suri)

"I don't think you need a result to have a discussion with someone. Discussion for me is for people expressing their different opinions. You have your opinions, and meanwhile I want you know my opinions as well. I don't need an agreement at the end. Neither, you don't have to agree with me, because it's just talk. There is no big deal. So most of time, I don't have to really think about it, or be prepared, like even though I have just only read the title, I can talk about it with people no problem." (2jin)

On the other side, the concept of consensus with substantive meaning is something described as ideal for the participants. For that reason, its significance in form is sometimes more valued than its substantive content. It is to say, people may involve and hold the conversation for the intention of seeking a sort of approval or agreement in form, but they do not make consensus as the necessary goal for an offline communication.

As found in the interviews, such consensus thinking also has significant impact on online expression behaviors of quiet participants. More than half of the participants said that, for most of the time, the reason motivating them to engage online deliberation is to support opinions that were the same or similar to theirs. It seems that expressing in a way of being supportive is the main form for Chinese participants engaging discussions. Moreover, thinking from the platform design, we know that online forum-style deliberation usually starts with an opinion-directed claim. This means that the attitude and the stance of the post can be quite clear from the beginning. Different opinions and standpoints, on the other hand, always come along, adding up more and more while the event or deliberation is developing. Subsequently, people often add further critique more easily, since more opinions are presented, and more information is disclosed in the discussion. Unlike being supportive, non-supporting opinions can be very varying from multiple-perspectives, and related to all aspects of the discussion. As most participants noticed, it usually takes more time and effort to collect, integrate and understand information, turning it into a well-stated new opinion, or even harder a convincing one in the opposition of others. By contrast, it can be much more convenient for people to simply agree on a ready-made opinion, offering some supplementary information from the existing accumulation. That makes committing to a supportive "role" from the beginning comparatively easy for the participants.

"I feel like to write such kind of post needs you to invest a lot of time and effort. I mean to make the post a good one to yourself first, then possibly to some other people, it's such a time-assuming work. I'd rather read something like that, very professional, informative and knowledgeable from other people, and make a comment down below. I don't think I would write something like that." (Chen YD)

"if you write something to criticize other's opinion, there must be someone who disagrees with you, replying to you with their different opinions, then you will have to respond to them…it is definitely harder than just agree,

you know? I don't want to spend so much time and energy for that. So most of time, I only like or comment something very simple for support." (2jin)

However, the more interesting thing is that, as the interviews show, there is not only one way to support, especially speaking of opinion expression. In fact, nearly half of the participants mentioned that they have been supportive in different ways, including improving/correcting the opinions of the one they want to support, adding different but not necessarily opposing opinions, or supporting the opinion by criticizing the other opposing opinions.

"In most cases when I wanted to post my opinions is when I've known one or two about this event, and I've read some opinions or discussions that made me feel the opinion group I rooted for was in the weak position. At that point, I really wanted to show my support by saying something." (Linda)

"There are so many people posting online. Say if you have an opinion, there must be one, two, so many different opinions from other people. Usually I will engage if I see some opinion very similar to mine, and show my support. Or if I don't see any, maybe I'll bring up my opinion as a new one, but normally I don't refute." (Fan HZ)

There were also plenty of the participants would like to give supplementary information as a way of being supportive.

"Usually if I want to discuss with people, I discuss with something I agree. Probably because I don't really like engaging conflicts. And I always listen to the others first. For example, if something is not mentioned, but I think it's worth to let people know, I will go ahead and speak it out." (Chen YD)

"I usually have my own opinions about this topic. For example, I'd like firstly to have a general idea about the main different opinions each opinion group holds. After reading some comments and replies, I'd know what's going on. At that point, if I see any group in a weak position because they are missing something, I'll post my opinion telling them it'd make more sense if you give a thought to that." (Wu Q)

"Usually when I want to express myself is the case that I know something others don't. I want to send a message that I know more than you. Otherwise, I want to add more information when people are discussing. You know, it is a chance to show you know more in details." (Ma S)

A few insisted that, even if they did not like getting involved in direct refutation, contradicting other opinions online, they would always collect evidence, being able to explain or defend their own opinion if it was in doubt.

"Divergence means incomplete answer to me, means you need to learn and reflect more. Sometimes I want to argue, because I believe they are wrong, and I need to defend my opinions. But until I have enough evidence and reasons, I'd hold them, looking for more information first. After all, it will be unarguable if there is plenty of evidence found." (PSK)

"I wont dodge divergence. But probably I won't really want to persuade anyone, or think why his opinion is so different from mine. I'll only want to defend myself, to prove how right I am." (Zhong R)

"I don't usually argue somebody is wrong, because to make a right or wrong judgment is hard. Most of time when I feel I need to say more is because I feel people don't really understand me or my point, and I need to do more explanation. (Liu)

Moreover, the online platform setting may also contribute to form the supportive pattern of opinion expression for quiet participants. As we know, online forum-style deliberation usually starts with opinion-directed post. This means that the attitude or the stance of the poster can be quite clear for audiences from the beginning. Different opinions and standpoints, on the other hand, always come along, adding up more and more as the event or deliberation develops. Subsequently, people are enabled to add are critique as more information in opinions are presented during the discussion. In that sense, opposing opinions can be varying from multiple-perspectives and developed to all aspects of the topic that they do not even converge towards the end of the discussion. However, it is still easier for people to agree or form their opinion upon a ready-made opinion, rather than coming out with some new and different points of view, which also makes it easier for people to commit to their supportive "role" from the beginning.

Secondly, however, as I found in the interviews, most participants do not consider online deliberation is consensus-friendly. When consensus is mentioned as the result of online deliberation, most participants used the word "impossible" to describe it. For them, reaching a consensus online is ideal. Disagreement not only is hard to hide, but can be also easily exaggerated in the text-based, post-reply form of online communication. With the absence of social cues, norms, etiquette, and relationship-building in online settings, different opinions are more difficult to muddle through in opinion exchange process. On the contrary, they are more likely to be magnified and persist out of the desire of self-expression and -image-building.

"*From my online deliberation experience, I personally think it (to make consensus) is extremely hard. Sometimes even though your logic is very persuasive, having solid evidence, there are still counter-views as always." (Michael Meng)*

"I feel there are always kinds of different opinions. Everyone has their own opinions, and wants to people to listen to them. In such a situation, reaching consensus is almost impossible." (Tina)

"Even though some people have no obvious difference at the beginning, they come up with some differences during the deliberation. It is inevitable." (Na)

Furthermore, it would be tricky to identify the end for a reason-based deliberation by considering the online settings. As was mentioned in the interviews, the end to an online deliberation does not equal to closure. Instead, for most participants, it only means that there is no more information to be added at the moment. Due to the asynchronous setting, there is no

absolute end. It is saying, people can always see the "end" as a pause, choosing to go back to the discussions with more information and evidence when they feel ready.

"If I do not reply, it means I'm not ready with my answer yet. In that case, you need to collect more evidence, so you can go back to the conversation when you are ready. Especially talking online, I don't know them, it's hard for me to admit their opinions with all the evidence information available there for me to do my own research. "(Psk)

"I think deliberation is a continuous process, you can go on reasoning forever as long as you feel there is still a lot more to say. You may feel speechless for now, but it doesn't mean you have been persuaded. That is the especially good part about discussing with strangers, because reasoning yourself could be the only thing you care about there." (Wang ZR)

On the other hand, considering of the Chinese social culture, it is also worth pointing out that successful self-image building through opinion expression not only requires a good level of ability in terms of knowledge and ability of information management, but also in terms of the acquisition of codes of conduct that is required to meet the expectation of the "audience" at the moral level. For quiet participants, moral qualities seem to be viewed as weightier in judging whether the opinion is convincing enough. In the interviews, a few participants admitted that, if they are not convinced by the nice personality and cultivation, they will not be convinced by the ideas, even though the person is making some good points:

"As I mentioned earlier, I want to talk because I want to be recognised, not only by what I said, like my opinion, knowledge or the information I could provide, and also by what I did, my behaviour. People would appreciate you as a person, not as a bunch of words. Maybe you could be shut by what I said, but that doesn't mean I'm winning you by who I am. Say, we argued so ugly that we couldn't even talk to each other anymore. I wouldn't think my opinion or what I said is that important in that case. It is not a good deliberation for me anyway." (Lao X).

"If we had different opinions, and he replied with logic and evidence, I would say this is a good deliberation. I mean people can be convinced by his opinions and knowledge of course, but being persuasive is more than that. it's more like I'm convinced by the way he/she presents his/her thoughts, his/her logic, his/her personality. You know I'd be rather impressed by the whole package, rather than just only opinions information." (Wu Q)

It is to say, while people are enjoying the more autonomous, responsible-free, and diverse online communication, they are also dealing with more difficulties and limits as a result. For online participants, it is not enough considering a good deliberation for only delivering information and knowledge. The success of deliberation is also, no different from the offline settings, related to other factors, such as attitude, tone, moral cultivation, values and communicative skills. In that sense, opinion and information exchange seem not to be good enough anymore. People also need to communicate on other levels with moral consideration, personal cognition and values for example, which the words-based expression cannot satisfy. As a result, online deliberation is preferred to be viewed as a learning approach rather than a solution for resolving difference or reaching consensus. It has also been approved by the

interviews. For most participants, the main reason for them to engage online deliberation was to acquire information and ideas. Only two participants mentioned that they found online deliberation play the role of conflict-solving.

On the other hand, the online communicative settings are believed to have strengthened the competitive spirit for online opinion expression, which may play a role in opinion polarization. As I found in the interviews, when they were asked about their motivation of online engagement, more than half of the participants admitted that they want to present themselves by having their opinions well expressed in front of other people. For that reason, they want their opinions persuasive and influential as much as possible.

"I always feel I'm too eager to prove myself when I engage online, like I want to conquer other people with my opinions." (Papa)

"there are only a couple of reasons for me to express online. For one, if people can know more about me through my opinion, for example, if people can be so impressed by what I said, I'll then post my opinions. I mean at least it will make me feel I can be understood, and I'm showing my best side and getting credit." (Lao X)

In online participation, expressing themselves in writing is a way for people to construct their self-image through role play. A sense of superiority is created mainly through discourse in the online communicative world, which becomes a major resource for discursive competition(s). Everyone wants to prove that their opinions are better than other people's. To achieve this, it is always easier for people to disprove other opinions than prove their own. Accordingly, differences of opinion not only tend to boost a competitive situation, but are also highly likely evolved into conflicts because of all the harsh criticism of one another. It was not hard to sense that feeling in the participants.

"I think if it's relevant to your own interest for... like saving face, there are not many good "listeners" in a real sense. Everyone wants their expression to be recognized, and so do you. In that sense, you just can't help yourself being a speaker rather than a listener, and in a persuasive way." (Wang ZR)

"If I don't know some topics well, I could barely be motivated. The discussion would not really be based on an interaction. In that case, I might "listen", but that doesn't mean I will buy it. I guess it's probably because of the psychological inversion, more or less. Topics I know, I would talk about my opinions after giving it serious thought… it can be a good chance to perform my knowledge and understanding in front of people, I think. It's not like I only want to express. I want to know how people react to it more. I think the fewer people reply to it, the more possible that people may not know more, or better than me, because you know people do not admit that online. So I will get feedback on my opinions, like where it is in online deliberation, to give myself a little bit credit." (Gao YL)

"If I talk about my opinions, it means I've given it some thought, and I know what I'm saying, I will only talk about it in a persuasive way in that sense. If I can't persuade other people with my opinions, which usually I won't admit of course, I'll just shut up. It's a kind of deliberation happened in my life too." (ZC)

The more people focus on improving their claims to make them perfect and convincing, the less attention they give to seeing and admitting to what is worthy or notable in others'. The more people wish to perform their opinions well, in many ways, the more eager they are to disprove the other's. The participants who have actually engaged in deliberation by expressing their opinions in front of others will find it even more difficult to reach a consensus with others in online deliberative settings.

Finally, although consensus is not the final goal for online deliberation, seeking common ground is a priority encouraging the participants to engage in deliberation. There is surely a line to distinguish these two ideas, consensus and common ground. Consensus is usually considered as result. Its value more represented in the sense of reaching an agreement as a result, always involving the substantial content, no matter in a form of language, words or actions. On the other hand, common ground is more likely a term describing the pre-conditions enabling to reach the goal of agreement. It refers to factors beyond some specific content, such as values, characters, and attitude, which may play a leading role to shape the thoughts and behaviors. By learning the interviews, there are a few conditions found have been stressed out as the similar knowledge level, the similar interests, the similar temperament, self-cultivation and characters, the similar background, experience and values, and the willing to continue a further communication. In that case, to avoid differences as much as possible, it is found that most participants would prefer to choose who they want to deliberate with, rather than deliberating with just anyone. 26 out of 30 people interviewed, said they prefer to engage in discussion with people with whom they have something in common one way or another.

"If I want to talk, I must talk with my friends, or someone I know. We have some common interests, so we can talk in a real sense. In online talking, I would construct a basic image of, like his social identity, personality… that stuff, not just focus on his words. That would make real difference to me in discussions." (MTX)

"I think I would feel it, whether I'd like to talk to them or not. Such sense is based on day-to-day contact, knowing more and more with time, including their personality, behaviour, words and deeds. I would prefer to get to know the person first before talking, so I can decide what and how I should talk to them. Usually I have a very clear boundary between someone I know and someone I don't know, when it comes to expression." (Wang LL)

Factors that could be gauged from a relatively short and simple conversation (such as knowledge level, or an interest in communicating further) were mentioned by relatively few people, compared with the factors of temperament, disposition, character, values, background and experience, which cannot be easily assessed via impersonal, temporary, online conversations. In other words, areas of common ground can be less easily found in online

communication than in offline, which was one of the things that prevented participants engaging in online expression.

However, is this finding telling me that Chinese participants online intend to look for people who are like-minded to deliberate with? To answer that question, it is necessary to understand what it really means by saying "like-minded". According to oxford dictionary, like-minded is used to describe the state having similar taste or opinions. Learning from the interviews, there are a few conditions found that the participants consider when choosing who they want to deliberate with online. By considering those conditions, such as similar background, experience, values, and interests, I can tell the intention of the participants is leaning to common-ground-seeking, even though they do not necessarily lead to opinion-changing for arriving consensus. Other qualities, including a similar knowledge level, the interest to stay in deliberate, temperament and disposition, may help people maintain an active, friendly vibe in discussion, but do not particularly produce like-mindedness. In fact, such conditions are better considered as factors that can work towards seeking or building common ground in thinking, rather than direct factors that can create the easy result of "like-mindedness".

Furthermore, as I learned from the participants, the factors which are more concrete and specific, including knowledge level, general interests and the willingness for engaging further communication, are less valued as common ground. By comparison, the other conditions which are more abstract and general, including the similar background, values, temperament and self-cultivation, are valued more for considering of playing a significant role in individualizing a person. The common in aspects like that do not have specific and substantial feature can be tested in a short term. Neither, they do not exert direct impact on the content of opinion, but rather function indirectly involving cognitive process based on long term. In other words, people who are in common of those qualities will be able to manage a deliberative communication based on different opinions, even though they can favour the better chance of finding common ground for delivering better interactive performance working at achieving some sort of consensus-directed outcome. In fact, three-fourths of participants reported that they wish they could look for such common traits before engaging deliberation as a widely appreciated strategy quite often approached in their everyday discussion.

"*I think for me it would be great if I know I'm communicating with the very similar mind with me. I mean if I know we are on the same knowledge level, or the same age, same background, or similar experience. If we are similar in that way, at least I know we would properly have an easy starting point." (Chen YD)*

"The major problem of online deliberation for me is that usually you don't know who you are talking to, like their background, values, educational level. Information like that can largely influence the way you build up the communicative relationship. Without it, it is usually not easy for me to be off guard, speaking freely, because there is a chance for everything to go really wrong." (Fan HZ)

"I now have learned not to deliberate so desperately online, because there are all kinds of people with different experience, knowledge background, values and interests. They probably won't be able to understand you, no mention to agree with you. Unless I deliberate in some professional forums. I'll say my opinions, in very details, because I know it's very possible that I'm talking to someone just as professional in this field as me. With the same knowledge background and understanding, it's less risky to turn a deliberation into a disaster." (Wu Q)

So, as I learned, if consensus/agreement is not good enough as a motivation, then what possibly makes people "talk" in the first place? If they much prefer to talk someone who shares common ground with them, whether it makes the online environment homogeneous mainly? Or thinking from another perspective, what different opinion expression really means to Chinese participants? Would it deliver any impact on communicative thinking that we can understand with a different cultural perspective? At the same time, the communicative settings of online forum make me wonder, if the phenomena only can tell the whole story of the interaction between the online environment and the communicative behaviors, also the thinking of the participants. After all, the conclusion would be too rough if we only focus on investigating the phenomena without considering the communicative mind cultivated by certain culture and surroundings. In this case, it especially refers to the deliberative thinking behind some of the non-textual online behaviors of expression, including liking, sharing, clicking and viewing. To be able to properly understand them, it also means to put them in the Chinese context, connecting with the concepts of communicative modesty and face culture.

When I tried to understand people's deliberative thinking with a cultural perspective, I found a dilemma. First of all, the communicative context can also make a big difference to people's expressive behavior, in terms of "face". As we discussed earlier, face formation is a dynamic process, that takes place in mutual and interactive communication between people. It is a part of establishing and maintaining one's image through communication. That is, the communicative performance can only make sense in the presence of an audience, which means that role-play and interaction with an "audience" are two important parts in the process (Goffman, 1990; Zhai, 2011). For a good role play, one needs to earn face by achieving or surpassing the expectation of audience (Zhai, 2011). As I learned from the interviews, the situation is pretty much the same in the online settings. The desire to display the best self in front of others is the main force that drives people to express themselves online.

However, the internet which is a medium of communication that is powerfully qualified for creating better conditions for building one's self-image, has also created various restrictions. In the last chapter, I discussed Zhai's (2011) views on the strategy used by Chinese people to earn face, which is to say one thing and do the opposite. However, it is not anymore the case for online communication. In online communicative society, the functional roles of words and expressive behaviours are not quite bounded as much as in offline environment in account of Chinese face. Certainly, we can draw a line between them by taking the textual content as words, and online expressive activities as online expressive behavior, such as posting, liking and sharing. However, when speaking of face-earning, it is hard to make such distinction clearly identified to deliver a complete expressive performance in front of the audience. In other words, the underlying meaning of behaviour in online setting cannot function well in a way to support verbal output just as in the offline setting for face-earning, since the audience will only be able to read them in a form of textual presentation. This means that the online participants have to put most effort on discourse management, as the main way of earning face by performing and communicating.

Meanwhile, what makes it more interesting is that Chinese participants are not completely free from the influence of modesty when they are trying to express themselves online. Just as in offline conversations, I found that most participants have disclosed such traits, especially at the beginning of a deliberation, when they draft their first few comments. For example:

"I will try to comment in an easy, more understandable way, make sure it's comprehensible enough, so that everyone can accept it…. After all, you can better keep the discussion going. I mean you don't want other people think you are showing off, playing authority, or parading knowledge or something." (Suri)

"I prefer a looney-tune sarcastic approach. I won't talk about my ideas, explaining something in a very systematic way right away. It would make you very loud, overconfident, showing-off of your knowledge or something.That's not something people would appreciate in discussion. Rather, I'd like to have an easy start with a sense of humour. It always can set a better foundation." (Da S)

"If I want many people in my post discussion, I would play a teacher, introducing the background and everything in the most comprehensive way I can. If someone had questions, I'd like to explain it in an easy way, so people can understand, unless he picks up on me, I would give a more or less sophisticated account of it." (Wu Q)

Therefore, by approaching the deliberative thinking of the online participants, I found it very complex and even a little contradictory for them to express opinions and manage their words. For one thing, the inescapability of different opinions online and all the difficulties for reducing and resolving conflict with online settings make consensus not the major outcome and driving

force for people to engage deliberative talks. As a result, it leads to a passive adjustment by the participants pursuing the other expectations out of deliberation, for example seeing it as a learning process. Also, to achieve a better result, they intend to seek for those who share the common ground to engage opinion expression. Speaking from the aspect of communicative culture, self-expression is an approach for people to promote their self-value out of the need of "face". In the meanwhile, people are also limited by the online platform and suppressed by the traditional communicative culture of modesty. That means they are very cautious about building up the positive image with words, even though that is the major approach in online world.

Such contradiction cultivates two kinds of deliberation practice. The first one is a support form of opinion-expressing participation. As I found, offering supplementary information rather than making critical contributions for the most participants, is a much easier way to engage with their own opinions online. Not only, supporters can be filled with different content with the identity of being a supporter in reasoning process, for example offering critical information and supplemental information. Even though there could be always argumentative tension embodied in opinion expression, no matter it is in a way of offering supplement or self-defensing, being under the cover of supporting an opinion can make it feel less aggressive. In Chinese context, it is much more conducive to make increments in evidential information. This may become the main source of contributions of evidence to the supporting side in the reasoning process.

Moreover, this could offer an explanation for why the major decrease of the evidential information came from the supporting opinion camp, but not the opposing one. With a dramatic decrease of opposing opinions, the tasks, such as criticizing and refuting other's opinions, can be largely disregarded from the supporting opinion camp. Comparatively, if a bold assumption is made here, the other ways of supporting an opinion, including offering supplementary information, or self-explanation and self-defending would become the major contribution to the evidential information increment. In fact, that was also the observation from the coding process. Despite between what roles of the opinion supporters can be changed in reasoning process, after all, in a homogeneous environment, the absence of opposition in general can result in the simplification of supporters' tasks, leading to a reduced propensity to offer critical and defensive information.

The second deliberation practice is the active pursuit of discourse authority, which leads to what I call “impulsive expression”. As we have discussed earlier, an ideal modesty image, in the offline social model, must be built in a way which the discursive content plays a role of giving a negative feedback in advance, while a good performance is delivered in a behavioural form. Without any visible behaviour online, textual expression alone is tricky to play both roles. It is to say, to meet the moral expectation of being humble, people cannot simply use language (words) for negative feedback as in offline settings. Furthermore, being silent online (meaning not carry out any expressive behaviours) cannot neither perform being modest. Otherwise, if they choose to flaunt and be loud, for example trying to impress the others with rich, professional information and profound logic, this could be easily judged as bragging, which is contrary to what Chinese peope appreciate in moral expression, and bring a series of negative effects, as people might be annoyed and resentful by opinions involving too much concepts, theories and knowledge.

Under such circumstance, the Chinese “face” culture has played a role to stimulate the quiet participants engage online expression in a passive way, and further contributing to the information increment in homogenous deliberation environment. For Chinese communicative culture in offline social environment, the expression of different, especially negative opinions are generally considered as a threat that can damage one’s face value. To protect the “face” value, it is usually the case that the more radically different opinions are, the more defensive people can get in communication, even though they are aware that the opinion they are defendin may not be a sound view (Liu, 2004; Muntigl and Turnbull, 1998; Jia, 1997). People’s reaction to the threat to their face, however, can be greatly influenced by the communicative relationship built up during the talking, and the communicative context where they are in. Chinese harmony culture also plays an important part in this process. With acquaintances, the Chinese usually value a good communicative relationship over the talk, which can make them more other-oriented rather than self-expression-focused, even if such behaviors may not completely sincere and authentic (for example, people hold back on expressing their own opinions to establish the appearance of a "good" relationship. We will discuss this in more detail in a later Chapter). This preference contributes to emphasising a high degree of self-cultivation (typical of Chinese modesty), and to the weakening of the act of self-expression that is part of establishing a “good" image, for Chinese people. As a result, when people intend to develop a sort of relationship before or during communication, even though they may want to defend

themselves when challenged, they usually do not engage in full self-expression because there is a risk of endangering the harmonious environment.

However, unlike the offline social environment, in public online forum style deliberation, a conversational discussion usually begins between strangers who have not built any kind of relationship beforehand. Such deliberation takes place in a post-reply format, which means, for some participants, that the interaction can be considered task-oriented, opinion-directed, and topic-centred from the very beginning. Participants do not have as favourable conditions as in the offline world, bonding with each other which is considered beneficial for cultivating mutual understanding between people (Fishkin et al., 2005). Without such affective bonding, different opinions expression can not only cause intense defensiveness for people trying to save their own face, but also highly possibly cause them refute each other, protecting their face by damaging the other in a more efficient counter-attack.

Meanwhile, as expressers, when people's opinions are challenged by strangers, the desire to save face can be more urgent. As I discussed earlier, face construction is not one-way, just based on one's own effort. It occurs between people getting along with each other in communication. In fact, giving face has been a social rule widely valued in daily Chinese communicative life, an important social resource for maintaining and strengthening connections. In this sense, Chinese face has a buffering effect that reduces or restrains possible further negative emotions in discursive communication. For example, people may pay attention to their words, making sure they are not too sharp or harsh when they raise different opinions in a conversation. However, this aspect of Chinese face is extremely limited in an online setting, since it is not usual to expect a total stranger to give you face in a hostile discussion without any sort of prior relationship build-up. It leads to another efficient way in online communication for people to save face, which is to try their best to prove their validity, namely by continuing to express in a professional and authoritative way, and at the same time attacking others. In the interviews, many participants shared similar experiences with me. Although they felt a lot of pressure from such online performances, and they knew that the outcome would not usually be very agreeable, they could not help arguing once they are engaged. Criticism, in fact, has unconsciously become a trigger that "sucks them into' deliberation, continuing to reason together with others.

"Generally, I intend to avoid any conflicts online, because I know I would be so urgent to proof myself, persuading people. In that case, it is hard for me to stop once I started." (Papa)

"I always think that to change one's opinion is such a difficult thing to do. It costs you a lot of thinking, energy, effort. You could think… ok, you don't have to persuade the others, you don't have to make other people agree with you, but I find myself eventually getting involved in meaningless arguments anyway. Especially when you meet someone really responsive on the same knowledge and cognitive level with you, you actually care so much about their criticism, which can raise your defense very badly." (Lao X)

"I feel sometimes I can be involved in a passive way. I mean, it's not like you are really argumentative or anything. You can just be really sucked in to certain discussions, for someone can respond to you, attack you in certain ways I suppose. After all, it's none of your business really." (Wang ZR)

Therefore, to talk about differences of opinion in a Chinese communicative context can be very tricky. Some of the characteristics of the online setting, including anonymity, asynchronicity, and invisibility, have contributed to the increase of different voices online, negative emotions are provoked and come out in expression, and it is difficult for people to confront and resolve differences through deliberation. For that reason, most Chinese people prefer to avoid conflicts online by talking to someone who shares common ground to engage discussions. This also encourages them to express themselves online in a way of being supportive to other people's opinions. What makes it more interesting is, in fact, such homophilous intention gives chances for heterophilous behaviours. For one thing, this pattern of expression means that, even though expressing different opinions, even in the textual form is not the preferred choice for Chinese participants, an online deliberative discussion could be still well balanced with different opinions presented in the form of support. For another, it potentially opens the opportunities to the deliberative moves, discourse and thinking, even though carrying the nature of homophily in the beginning, can be developed to heterophilous deliberation later. Especially over time, such behaviours may create the opportunities and need for self-deliberation on the individual level (I will come back, discuss on this point more in Chapter 7).

Meanwhile, such deliberative communication can be provoked by impulsive expressive behaviour. Under the influence of traditional face culture, online settings have overcome the limitations of Chinese people's self-expression, which is cultivated by the Chinese cultures of modesty and harmony. Unconsciously, critical expression has replaced harmony and consensus, and become the incentive for online information-sharing and opinion-exchange. Because such expressive participation is almost felt compulsive and passive for quiet participants, few of them had positive response. As I found in the interviews, more than half of the participants complained about such horrible conflicting experience online, as it dragged them into the seem endless and meaningless argument.

"Based on my own online deliberation experience, I think most of them are failures. What can I say… people nowadays are all quite individualistic, more stubborn maybe. It's not that easy for them to listen, or willing to accept other's opinions." (Guo W)

"For most online forums, people would rather stick to their own opinions and logics. Probably it's because people have realized that there is no way you can persuade all others…So, for me, online forum is more likely a place where I can learn new information, perspective to kind of argue with myself. I used to express myself a lot online, but soon I realized that to make your voice influential enough is not possible on your own. Without a team and some professional help, you can't make the whole public your audience." (Wu Q)

"Usually I engage with my opinion is when I feel there is something significant and very essential still missing after a whole lot of discussions. I feel I have to say it, to tell everyone. But what happens in reality is usually the opposite to what you expected. It's like this is my opinions, right? But people always misunderstand you somehow, or they just distort your meaning on purpose, or they simply just ignore what you've said. You argued, but for what…So now I learned that trying to make people agree with you isn't very practical, and it is wrong. Deliberation for me now is a self-enlightening process. Like I can be inspired by something I've never considered before. I quite like that feeling." (Da S)

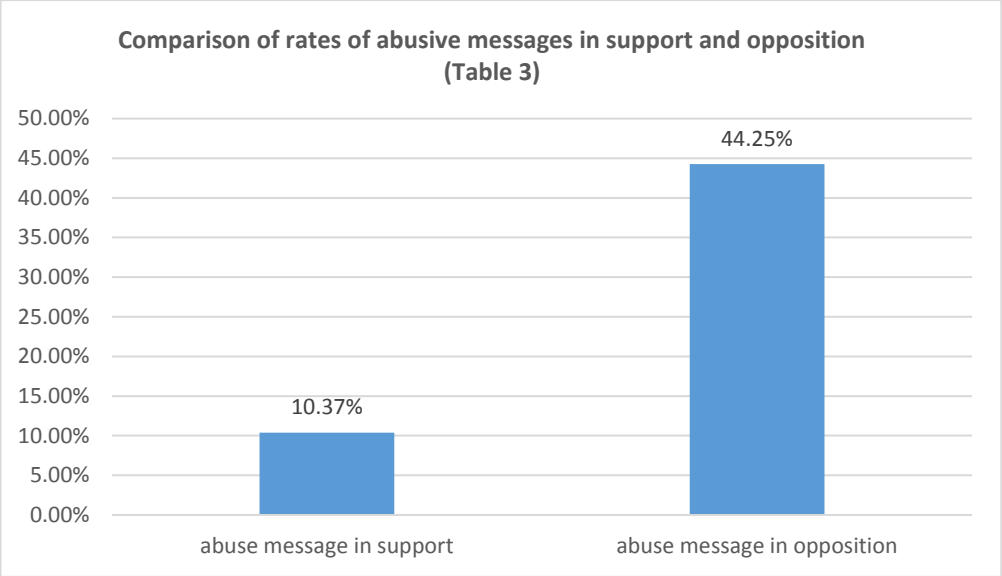
In the next section, I will take the aggressive and abusive messages as an example, develop my analysis on the impulsive behaviors and thoughts of online opinion expression in the heterophilous setting.

5.2.1 Focusing on antagonism: Talking about aggressive, abusive messages

5.2.1.1 Presentation and discussions of the online evidences

Abusive expression is widely considered as one of the common phenomena in online discussion (Tabbi, 1997; Smith and Osborne, 1997). Learned from the earlier literatures, abusive expression, online flaming is commonly existing in online world, and is accused as one of the main reasons for low level of engagement in online discussion (Alonzo and Aiken, 2004; Christopherson, 2007). Surprisingly, in contrast to the interviews, the proportion of abusive messages in the total sample was not large at all, accounting for only 18%. It made me wonder if people's general impression about the communicative environment of online forums is biased? From looking at the online posts and replies, this discrepancy is attributed to three things. First of all, the coding categories were based only on the written content of all the online messages, which means that some messages which were abusive, but which did not contain abusive words were not detectable. For example, attitudinal abuse or allegorical abuse may not have been coded under the abusive message category, even though readers could tell that such messages were abusive (attitudinally and semantically), and this further influenced their understanding of the overall online deliberative situation (I will come back to this point in the later section).

Secondly, I found that people can be more sensitive to different opinions in more inharmonious discourse. According to the past research that the feeling of being abusive is more likely recognised in the conflicting context (Kato et al., 2007; Thompsen, 1994; McKee, 2002), it may suggest that people could be more sensitive, led to negative emotional response, even though they do not necessarily represent hostility (Kato and Akahori, 2004). With the considerations, the proportions of abusive messages in supporting messages and opposing messages have been compared. The result supports my assumption. As Table 3 shows below, there is much more abuse in oppositional messages (the rate is 4 times higher than in supportive opinions). It is saying, when it comes to different opinion expression, people are more likely to attack, or to be attacked by, each other with abusive language. However, if it means the online abusive, aggressive expression can frustrate the willingness of the potential participants to engage online deliberation as it is widely believed? Is it, therefore, a possible cause responsible for the decrease of the critical evidential information in the reasoning process?



To better understand this, I take a further step, comparing different types of abusive messages. I noticed that, even though participants are inevitably harassed by the online conflicting discourse context, it may not be the reason which necessarily stops them deliberating online with more evidential information. In all the abusive sample messages, pure abusive messages accounted for the greatest proportion, at 69%. The proportion of simple abusive messages was 25%, and evidential messages also containing abuse made up the smallest part, accounting for only 6%. This shows that, in an online deliberative environment, the amount of abusive

language used in the reasoning process, namely as evidential messages, is very limited. Therefore, why "abusive" is still the general impression for most participants?

Moreover, I wonder, if quiet participants could simply skip over those pure abusive message or information in favour of those more "nourishing" information presented in the wholesome, or aggressive messages? As quiet participants, it points to their attribute of being "quiet", which is only being interested in knowing the topic, forming and developing their opinions through understanding and thinking deliberatively (although this does not mean that they have never expressed themselves online before), namely engaging through self-deliberating online as a learning process. In that sense, they could participate online deliberation as "outsiders". On the other side, abusive messages involve little effective evidential information, but are mainly emotional catharsis. In an online communicative setting, it is expected to have more autonomy and freedom to choose who you want to talk to, what information you want to use, and in what way you want to use them. In such online settings, therefore, I wonder if there is a chance that abusive messages may have limited influence for outsider participants, since they may not be as much involved as the participants participating through expressing their own opinions, which could be less emotionally directed by abusive language in deliberation process.

Moreover, considering of opinion expression alone, if the only case is what I learned from the past online flaming researches, which is the online flaming communicative environment and abusive expression can largely inhibit online expression, with different communicative culture and thinking, I wonder if it could deliver different effect to quiet participants? For example, abusive messages (including those that are abusive in tone and expression), as we know, can cause concern and fear for opinion expression. However, participants may have a different understanding for participating indirectly. By saying indirect participants, I mean those participants who engage in online deliberation by expressing opposing opinions in an indirect way, for example by posting or sharing non-opinion-directed information related to the topic that may influence the opinion formation of other people, or who express their opposing standpoint by liking the opposing opinion of other's. And more importantly, I want to know, if abusive discursive environment largely inhibits online expression, what triggers the different opinion expression of quiet participants who are indented to be quiet, but engage in opinion expression or other online communicative actions occasionally in deliberation, or they do not engage opinion expression at all? With those questions, I tried to investigate the interviews data for offering a more comprehensive understanding about online flame.

5.2.1.2 A further analysis based on the interviews

As I found in the interviews, abusiveness for most of the quiet participants may not necessarily mean to end the conversation. As they mentioned in the interviews, expressing abusively firstly is not their choice in deliberation. It is more likely an action taken as a passive defence.

"I think I'm that kind of person who is easily influenced. For example, I remember when I discussed the amendment of the Animal Protection Act, there were a lot of crazy activists of animal rights accusing those officials something like... they should be punished, like eaten alive. To be honest, I think my professional literacy is much better than those people. I mean I can't imagine being like them. But the fact is, I just became as malevolent as them, expressing so aggressively online. I didn't know why I behaved like that. I just felt I can't help it". (Papa)

"I know I should be just me. But most of the time in reality, if the people I'm "talking" to are aggressive, like their tone is quite intense, the attitude is quite subjective, I would be very much influenced, and treating then just the same. In that case, argument cannot be avoided, and sometimes comes along with abusive language." (Wu QY)

"Speaking for myself, I think I can keep a good attitude for most of time when I talk to people. But if someone offended me, or attacked me, I'll be aroused, trying to fight back." (Michael)

The evidences show that it was not the initial intent of quiet participants to express aggressively or irrationally. It could be more likely an emotional reaction to the context or opponent nature of conflict.

From that point, despite of the aggressiveness, I wonder if online flaming environment could be responsible for stimulating such opinion expression actions of quiet participants? By analyzing the interviews, I found out, the abusive deliberation discourse, in a way, intensified a kind of ambivalence towards online expression. For one thing, as it has been discussed in the last chapter, Chinese modesty ideally educates people, especially in the conflicting context, to turn anger and resentments into inner peace and happiness for the common good. A positive moral role plays significant part in settlement of disputes, namely, to gain the respect and to urge reflection from other people by keeping a low profile and showing weakness. In the case, not only negative emotions, any kind of emotion expression is not encouraged. For another, because of the increasing influence of the western culture in modern Chinese society, the achievement of self-value and the arising awareness of self-expression is greatly promoted with popularity of application of the internet, which is considered has challenged the traditional social and cultural ideology to a great extent (Damm, 2007; Yang, 2003b). In study of Ye et al.'s (2014), they defined such ambivalence as "the bi-cultural self" (also see Lu, 2008), which is used to identify the individual-oriented self and the society-oriented self. The individual-

oriented self, to great extent, is characterized by the western culture including being independent, autonomic, actively seeking for the achievement of self-value, -rights, and –interest (Ye et al., 2014). During the interviews, I have experienced the big impact bringing to the understanding of traditional Chinese communicative culture.

"I think the point to discuss with people is mainly to find a way to recognize and confirm your own idea. It can motive you engage the deliberation more. If I come across some opinions really different from mine, I intend to persuade other people. Unless they can bring more and better evidence, information, and reasons, I think I'll listen. Its also a learning process at that point." (Zheng H)

"Divergences means the end of discussion. When I feel I'm capable to persuade people, I'll continue arguing, because I want to achieve the best, so people will admire me you know. When I feel I'm not capable, however, I probably won't want to engage anymore. I guess I'll still read from the others, but I stick to my opinions. I'm not that kind of person who easily agrees with other people." (Gao YL)

"If you disagree you disagree. This is the deal…like once I've made my mind, unless you have really good reasons, you can't really change my opinion. Especially when it's very personal business. It's about my self-interest, I want to be in charge and make the decision for myself. In that case, I think only 30% of me willing to listen to other people." (Zheng XJ)

"I think deliberating online means to express different opinions. Maybe I would never refuse anyone, but I will express my opinions, my different opinions." (Fan HZ)

However, unlike the individual-oriented self, the society-oriented self is still located on the basis of the self-nature embodied in relations and the moral tension, which is featured in Chinese culture as sensitivity to others, in-group integration and priority of collective goals (Ye et al., 2014). Those features can also be detected with most of quiet participants:

"I think as priority you should respect other people's opinion, then try to express the opinion of your own… I always try to go along with the people I'm having a discussion with." (Suri)

"I usually will listen to other people first, see if there is anything missing, or anything different from my opinion, then I'll think to engage the discussion. Maybe I'm not that kind of people who always want to talk about their opinions, because I'll think a lot, for example, what if there is somebody else there knowing so much more and better than me? What if I don't really know it as well as I thought? What if my opinion doesn't make any contribution to this conversation? What if people are not really interested in what you are talking about...so only if I know you are interested, and I know about this topic well enough, I could bring up some of my own opinions first. But listening to other people, knowing who you are talking to, will still be very important to me." (Chen YD)

"I always have this moment that I'd rather give up self-expression in a discussion just for maintaining the social atmosphere or the relationship." (Shan L)

"Probably I care about what other people think too much. If I discuss it with someone, surely, I want it to turn out a good result for both of us. If the other person is not happy about it, I wouldn't want to force them with my will, I mean to hurt other's feelings, or harm their interest. For me, deliberation is to achieve the result beneficial for everyone." (Wu QY)

Such contradiction between the need of being individual self and the requirement of being social self by the traditional value and culture could bring big dilemma to self-expression in

the conflicting environment. When people are "forced" to make a compromise because of certain factors in such environment, for example the conflicting context, the moral pressure, the need of remaining harmonious relationship, it could worsen the struggle, widen the gap between the inner demand and the extrinsic action. At this point, the key of self-expression is not about expression per se, or if the opinion is spoken out or not, but the ambivalence mind that people desire to be heard while they are not enabled to express (see discussion in Pennebaker, 1985).

The ambivalence, found for some of the quiet participants, can lead to rumination which is believed as one of the main causes for expression inhibition (Joormann and Gotlib, 2008; Joormann et al., 2010; Whitmer and Banich, 2007). It is to say, some participants could be extra sensitive to those critical opinions against them, thus feeling uncomfortable to take on deliberation mission or challenges. Being in highly risky environment as abusive or greatly aggressive conflicting discourse, it could give them more concerns and worries which lead to over self-reflection and rumination. For quiet participants, it is especially the case that the limited engagement is not for lack of expression desire, but the over reflection, rumination concerning the possible negative consequences from the opinion engagement in deliberation. As I noticed in the interviews, most of the participants have concerned that if opinion expression would incur aggressive refutation and even personal abuse.

"I don't post as much as I used to anymore, because… what am I going to say… it's hard to please everyone. I only post my opinions in certain situation, for example, if the topic is not very personal-opinion-related, or it's not too controversial, I'll then talk about some opinions in general." (Michael)

"if I post something very opinion-directed, informative, trying to be influential and persuasive or something, I'd feel anxious, because I'd troubled by some uncertainties, for example what kind of comments I would get? Where this discussion would be led to? If I'm capable to handle all the critiques… "(Papa)

"I do have opinions and feelings I want to tell people, but I'm not sure I could get them out online. Everything is so public online, I mean if you say something, I have to be responsible for what you said. As what I have seen from online forum, most messages are pretty subjective and emotional. I don't think it's a comfortable place for me to say too much." (Wang LL)

Therefore, the concerns and worries to negative consequences of online expression could become the cause inhabiting the expressive action, which is in conflict with the primal expression desire.

However, what I found more interesting is, abusive and aggressive discourse can also trigger impulsive engagement for quiet participants, which could see as a chance for them to break the

bonds, and release the expression desire in a way. As plenty of participants mentioned in the interviews, it acted as a "stimulation", provoking them on the emotional level, so they will be more radical, frank and argumentative, especially for those who have been through such ambivalence mind state. They could be tied up in the imprisonment of harmony in offline life for too long, and already lost the awareness and desire for expressing themselves truly in front of others. Most quiet participants described it as a feeling of nervousness and an initiation of tension that is normally unpleasant, but was hard to resist. Once they have got that feeling, they cannot help but become a "fighter" in deliberation, criticising, defending, and justifying by giving more evidential information in their opinions.

I wouldn't spill out too much in the beginning. If I see people getting confused or anything in the response, I would like to talk more, and make them understand. But if they pick on me right away, my fighting spirit would be triggered, which drives me to try harder. Now I've got better and better at controlling my emotions, but I used to get dragged into such discussions, like I spent so much time and effort that even affected my job and life. I knew it was just meaningless argument at the end of the day, because most of the discussions ended up with no results, but I just couldn't help myself in the moment. It feels like you would be obsessed with the discussion until the last minute when you have nothing left to offer. (Wu Q)

"If I have different opinions in offline conversation, I wouldn't bother to persuade them. Well... because everyone is supposed to have different opinions, it doesn't really matter. But I know I always hold on to my thought, like I think I'm the right one. So, most of time I will shut my ears, or just pretend to agree, but I don't really change my mind. It's different in online discussion though. If I have something I don't agree with, or people don't agree with me in online communication, I would really want to argue with them somehow, and mostly can become very aggressive." (Zhong R)

"Normally I'm not used to express my opinions, but I figured the time I can be the most argumentative is when I talk to someone who is not very nice. It will make me very consistent, becoming a debater with bad attitude just like him/her. I could say a lot about my opinions but I'm probably not a good listener." (Zhong R)

Considering of the deliberation experience of certain type of participants, for example to promote the true expression of people (Hyde, 2010), this made me wonder, whether such engagement, even though impulsive and passive, can deliver any positive outcomes. Learning from the interviews, I noticed, for a few participants, the impulsive expression "forced" by the abusive and aggressive discourse can create a kind of expressive attitude which is against the downside of traditional Chinese communication culture in reality. Despite of the negative emotional feelings, they consider online deliberation can be used as a way for more authentic self-expression than in offline conversations.

"I'd say I discuss more with people online than offline. Sometimes you just need to say what is really in your mind you know. In real life, it's not always the case. You have so many things need to be considered, such as the feelings of other people and the relationship. I just don't like arguing with people online, but once you've tried, you'd know. I guess you can always express, especially if you have the desire, and that's something you are interested.

You just need to express yourself and learn how not to care about what other people say to you too much." (Shan L)

"In fact, I know what I want to say, but when you actually say it with people you know, you just cannot help to decorate a little, to exaggerate a little, or to hide something. That makes me feel fake and boring. So sometimes I don't think the discussion is very authentic offline with people you know. I would rather talk to strangers online in that case. Even though it could be more aggressive, at least I can say something, or have something I really want to say or hear." (Da S)

"There is another kind of result talking online I can call it success, which is when you get things very personal, you argue with people, and both of you get very aggressive. That could be a sign telling you that you've really got him/her. Taking my experience for instance, I remember once I read a post. it was a big talk about democracy and patriotism trying to overrate a nude photo, just because the person in the photo is a well-known political activist. I thought what the post said was totally nonsense. But I also felt there was no need to take it so seriously. Then what I did? I squelched him with biting sarcasm. Not very civilized I know, and those posts are deleted by the moderator later, but I got so many "likes". I was really happy! Precisely because they were deleted, it proved that I did it." (Wu Q)

It seems that, for quiet participants being a more active expresser, abusive messages and aggressive communicative environment could unconsciously function as a trigger or catalyst, becoming the motivation and driving force for their opinion expression. The online communicative settings have created a public sphere where there is more freedom and autonomy, less responsibilities, dependencies and experience of social bonding. In such a sphere, communication could take place in a more argumentative context. On one hand, it adds more concerns and fear can contribute to expression inhibition. On the other hand, it could enhance the ambivalence and stimulation sensitivity which could wear down people's intention on achieving consensus but produce more polemic and emotional expressions. As Baumeister and Tice (1987) once commented, emotional response can be a motivation to express. As a result, the focus of online communication could has shifted from opinion-exchange to the one-way communication, focusing only on self–expressing. In this case, even though quiet participants are more likely intended to engage online expression in a more supporting and compromising way including "liking", sharing and offering supplement information, sending warm message to protect themselves from the possible consequences, aggressive and abusive discourse could force quiet participant, in a way, passively engage in reasoning process, unconsciously trigger impulsive expression on the emotional level. Normally such experience has not received positive response at the moment, but after a period long enough when people have their intensity of emotional experience decreased (Creamer et al., 1992), and are actually aware to learn that the feared consequences may not occur, or not so unbearable to experience. This could ease their anxiety, giving courage to those who want to be heard but normally lacks desire or courage for opinion expression in real life.

However, for the majority of quiet participants as I noticed, such experience brings more negative perception and influence than the positive. In the interviews, such emotional experience can put them through the ambivalence situation again in the post-treatment. It is to say, after engaging such "forced" expression, the negative feelings and consequences will confirm their former negative impression and concerns, evoking more negative feelings such as regret and repulsion. The effect of the second-time-ambivalence have hit many participants from the interviews.

"I think there are more irrational people online than offline. From my experience, I see so many, as we call them "keyboard man". So, I wouldn't want to argue with somebody like them. Plus, I have discussed online in forum. Actually, I was just expressing my opinions, but there were always some people took it personal, attacking you for you said something they didn't agree. So probably because of that, I usually don't talk about my opinions online." (Linda)

"I have talked my opinions with people online before. For example, after I read through some discussions, I realized there was something missing, something I thought it was necessary to mention, to let the others know. I knew there must be a lot of disagreements, but I felt it was only right to share my opinions. But things can always go wrong you know. I found it really hard to express myself properly to people. It was neither that people misunderstood you, distorted your meanings, or they were not listening at all. You wanted to explain more, argue more, but after that you asked yourself, what is the point? So the desire is less and less now. I mean you know you can never make people understand, so why bother?" (Da S)

"I'm not a very argumentative person, especially online. However, once I encountered someone who criticized me in a nasty way, all I can think about is to prove myself and beat them. It used to bring me a lot of emotional issues. So now I just learned. I always try to avoid conflicts. Either I only say something not so controversial or critical, for example information not very opinion-directed or emotion-involved, or I just keep my mouth shut." (Lv JH)

Consequently, even though abusive and aggressive discourse, to some extent, can trigger emotional expression, forcing quiet participant passively engage in reasoning process, such "active"-seemed expression is more likely a one-off behaviour. It means, when the negative impression is confirmed through the cognitive process, it more likely intensifies the negative cognition, leading to inexpression rather than positive emotional rumination.

On the other side, speaking from the "outsider" role of the quiet participants, it seems that abusive messages are not so rejected for them as it is usually thought. First, even though pure abusive information has very little contribution in the reasoning process on the information level, it seems to work as a "loudspeaker" for unconsciously catching public attention in a way more efficiently than offering solid reasons in the online communicative settings. In online public deliberation, the key is "public attention". Leaving the content aside, the online

communicative setting enables a discussion topic to gain enough attention for all kinds of opinions by just being ill-mannered. Getting attention in an online forum type of deliberation is determined by the count of both clicks and replies. As we learned from the interviews, that is the factor most considered by participants deciding which topic is more attractive to them. More than half of the participants said they are usually interested in the discussion topic with the highest number of "clicks" and "replies". Consequently, these factors may stimulate deliberative thinking, and initiate an intense deliberation.

Especially, it is interesting to detect another imperceptible attitude of the quiet participants to abusive evidential messages in the interview. It is largely considered with the Chinese communicative culture. When achieving consensus is overemphasized in Chinese cultural values, as for example in the value of harmony, it sometimes loses its substantive context by being only formalistic in reality. As a result, more and more Chinese people hunger for true expressivity and expression both emotionally and at the level of information. The online communicative setting has responded to the call, even at the cost of a harmonious language environment.

"I have to tell you another kind of deliberation success for me, which is, even though we didn't have a delightful deliberation, for example in a cooperative, respectful air, leading to agreeable or mutual beneficial results, even though I have to delete my account for pissing off people, or even end up insulting each other, I just know I did something right from other people's reaction. I know I have got to the point in the deliberation. and it makes me feel so good, a sense of accomplishment too." (Wu Q)

"Sometimes you have the feeling that the communication between people is not real anymore, especially with someone you know. You have to pretend something, hide something, and varnish something, like you cannot help it. So, I would rather to go online, writing and reading from strangers. I think if people don't know each other, there's still a chance we can be the true self. In that sense, I personally think deliberation success means you have fully expressed yourself. As for arriving at consensus? I don't think it is necessary to me." (Da S)

Therefore, even though being abusive can be seen a little extreme for emotional expression, as long as the messages contain the information who thinks valuable, educative, unique, or just interesting, they can be appreciated by participatory readers as a way of showing authentic emotion, feelings and different standpoints. In that case, abusive expressions can be separated from the content of the message, not simply labelled as completely random or meaningless, but as "bold" gestures, especially for voicing criticism and opposition. In that sense, as one of the emotional expressions, abusive messages, especially those representing certain opinion attitude, or including certain evidential information can be appreciated as one of the information resources, and still counted to the effective information output of online deliberation.

5.3 The ability of online quiet participants: The influence of deliberation to participants

5.3.1 The analysis of online materials: Focusing on evidential messages

In this section, I mainly focus on the influence of online deliberation as information environment and online communicative platform to the group of quiet participant. Similarly, by studying the online materials, my main purpose is to detect any phenomena or clues which enable me to develop the analysis of the interview materials based upon, to understand online deliberation on the aspect of the ability of online quiet participants. As an information environment, I have targeted evidential information in all the online messages this time. The results are showing that the evidential information offered in the sample messages consists of several types, including assumption/assertion, citation information, professional knowledge and values/logics. 35% of the messages contains assumption/assertion, almost twice as much as citation which is the second largest amount of information. The messages contain professional knowledge and values/logic are in equal proportions, and significantly less than the messages containing information of experience, common sense and example/analogy.

Speaking from the perspective of message-readers whose focus lies more on the content of the message, it seems that messages containing assumption/assertion, value/logic, experience and common sense are more subjective. Assertion refers to a kind of conclusive, judgemental information which is used as evidence directly without proper reasoning. Assumption is the unverified assertion. It is also offered as evidence without being subjected to a proper process of reasoning. Both types of information are inherently subjective. Value/logic is reflected in the opinions emphasising on values or logical output, usually based on participant's individual background, standpoint and experience. Taking the discussion on foreign rescue support for example, those who wanted to invite foreign rescue teams may have been people who were seriously affected by the disaster, while those who wanted to delay the foreign rescue may have been thinking about the overall picture, trying to coordinate the possible consequences after the disaster. Without more information filling-in, discussions involving value and logic is nothing more like a thinking game. It makes sense of opinions through building connections between various perspectives based on logical layout, which presents a kind of subjective thinking pattern. Experience refers to personal experiential output based on factual information gathered at a certain time. This can be recognized in descriptions that reflect what happened,

an awareness ex post facto, which cannot happen without the subjective involvement of individuals. Finally, common sense is the information related to a kind of summary of experience over a comparatively long term that is widely recognized, or even taken for granted by most people. Together, these subjective information types make up 58% of the sample messages.

On the other hand, some information types, including reference information, professional knowledge and examples in messages are relatively objective. Considering reference information first: this is used in reasoning by online participants as more objective material that people can refer to verify an argument/position. As I observed from the coding, it is mostly factual information, such as news reports or official opinions (for example authoritative comments and reviews). Although such reference information cannot completely avoid a subjective component, the information per se is not usually processed much by those participants who use it to form and develop their opinions, and thus represents certain objectivity. Likewise, professional knowledge-based information, such as definitions, theories, formulae and calculations also has objective value, even though it can be used in various ways to support subjective judgements and understandings, serving different subjective purposes and intentions in an instrumental way. As professional knowledge per se, however, people use it as a more objective way for making their opinions more convincing in the reasoning process. Objective messages including these components account for 42% of the total sample. Therefore, from the perspective of readers, there were almost 20% more subjective components in evidential messages than objective components.

Secondly, I also wonder if we can understand the online messages at the level of information-use. First of all, I counted up the number of the messages involving example and analogy type of information. I consider example and analogy as the same category, because examples usually can be used as analogies for the better demonstration in reasoning process. I could deduce that, considering at the level of information-use ability, there is some explanation for why such example/analogy type of information as preference used by some participants. For example, it could mean that the participants need to be aware of certain logical connections between the example they choose, and the views they try to demonstrate, so that they can elaborate their view well by examples. Such process requires information users have the ability to properly consider, master, and use the example information. This informational component makes up only 9% of the sample.

Besides, I classified common-sense, assertion and assumption under another big category. Learned from the coding process, common-sense information always accompanies assertion/assumption and professional knowledge, and the boundaries between them are not very distinct. For example, subjective assumption/assertion is usually recognised by its form rather than by its content. It was mainly used as evidence in the sample messages in two ways. First, it could be taken for granted as common-sense information. For example, some information is so commonly agreed on by people that most information users find it persuasive enough without giving further explanation. Second, it can be used as a kind of authoritative conclusive knowledge, treated as "common sense". This was especially reflected in discussions which had many participants with similar professional backgrounds. Professional knowledge, as a special kind of information, in a traditional sense, is recognised to have the feature of having been gained through individual effort to learn it, rather than simply by accessing it. The extra effort not only makes it more valuable, but also shows that the information is more difficult than average to master and manage. Such knowledge-style "common sense" conveys a sense of authority, and these information users are considered to be more able to manage and manipulate information than the average participant.

However, this type of information can be sometimes tricky to detected in the online setting. For example, when I coded for such information, I found it could be textually untraceable, occurring in a form of thinking matter-of-course, especially in discussions in which the majority of those involved had a similar professional or experience background. Even though people may use such common-sense thoughts as a kind of knowledge information, for example, to fill-out the logic embodied in text-based expression, they may feel that it is not necessary to bring it out in words, giving further explanation, as they assume that it is just what 'everyone knows', or have just tried to simplify their reasoning language. Therefore, sometimes it is a sense that there is a thinking between words, may being reflected in the form of "assertion/assumption" but not always fully presented in text. The statistics showed that common sense did not account for significant proportion of the sample messages, which is just 6%. That is, if the information appeared in a form of "assumption /assertion", or used as common-sense saying, or treated as common-sense kind of knowledge information shared with other people who have similar professional or experience background, it can be classified under the category of common sense and assumption/assertion (since the boundary between them is not quite clear). Otherwise, if it was used as common-sense-style thinking, and could only be

sensed in support of a certain reasoned outcome, we might fail to identify it through text. Even so, information identified as common sense and assumption/assertion together is still considerable, accounts for 41% of the total sample, which goes well beyond the proportion of information classified as professional knowledge (14%) for example.

Meanwhile, I shall consider the information classified under logic/value category could be a production of deliberative interaction at a high level of thinking. Such information refers to those expressions used for presenting logic pattern, interpreting objective laws, represented as a foundation for judgement- and conclusion-making. As a value/logic component in reasoning is usually reflected in the process of information management through thinking, it always appears with informative components such as reference information, professional knowledge and experience. To demonstrate a point of view containing value and logic explanation required information users not just are supposed to know particular information or knowledge, but also be able to manage and manipulate it, making it serve for presenting a persuasive reasonable way of thinking. Messages including this component made up 13% of the total sample.

However, observing from the coding process, logic/value elaboration usually go along with reference information, it is not always the fact the other way around. It is to say, reference information, such as factual information, statistics, opinions from others professional or authoritative, is not necessarily accompanied by value/logic in reasoning process. Instead, from what I observed from the online messages sample, reference information was preferred to use on its own for most cases without any further elaboration or information processing. This may be one of the consequences of online information overload and information fragmentation. The development of information technology has widened access to information and made it easier to access than ever. As a result, an information-rich argument can take place with far less expenditure of time and effort than previously. Participants can present " high quality" expression simply by copying and pasting. Reference information in that sense requires little effort to "learn" and "know" in the traditional way, but maybe the ability at the level of information-searching and -selecting. Therefore, reference information can be classified in the "medium ability" category, which comprised 19% of the overall sample. Besides， I shall consider personal experience, or any experience at all as an easy type of reasoning information, as it is not very much in the need of being collected, selected or learned on purpose, it is some occurrence or events or fact practically contact with or be observed by that person who has the

ownership and the authority of interpreting. Such information in evidential messages drawing on experience comprised 4% of the sample.

Nevertheless, the analysis and discussions for online materials can only offer us a general idea, a start point for me to further investigate, confirm, and develop the understanding of the online participant's ability based on the interview evidence. As I assume by looking at the online information sample, the messages involving the information could present higher level of ability, including example/analogy, value/logic and professional knowledge, comprised 36% of the total, while a medium and low level of ability, including assertion/assumption, common sense, experience and reference information, comprised 64% of all the online sample messages. Therefore, the result based on text expression could be less than ideal. However, I wondered if this is the actual story can be told about the participants, especially for quiet participants as the focus of this study, as we know those participants are the group who only are argumentatively involved writing online occasionally but mainly in a way non-textual or evidential-information-free, such as posting simple messages, sharing, liking, and viewing. How such information environment affects their ability in deliberation? Whether they are featured as low-ability as well? How they apply their abilities through online forum platform? And what they are capable to contribute in the online deliberation? In the analysis of the interview materials, I hoped to find the answers to those questions.

5.3.2 The analysis of the interviews

5.3.2.1 Information-Taking

As I discussed earlier, there are two procedures that contribute to opinion formation online. The first is known as ‘consideration process’ in which people collect and learn information from online deliberations, making their selection and judgment based on considerations, which form their primary opinion before they exchange ideas with other people in deliberation (Zaller and Feldman,1992). It means the focus more lies on information-taking which mainly refers to information collection, selection, analysis and absorption.

Thinking of information-taking first, participants inevitably are influenced by internet agenda-setting, the information environment and the public opinion. As much as most quiet participants can be triggered by opinion-based information, when they start to get interested in certain topic and further want to learn more, I found out, however, most quiet participants generally prefer information objective, factual and logical rather than subjective descriptive and emotional. It

first of all can be supported with the topic found are popular for most quiet participants. Learned from the interview, even though half of the participants mentioned that they spent decent time in easy topics too, including entertainment, sport and fashion, almost all the quiet participants from the interviews admitted that they are attracted to serious topics such as public events, politics and state affairs, society, people's livelihood, science and technology. For that reason, the participants I approached in this study were more interested in serious than easy topics. It could mean, in terms of information type, they would prefer information more factual, logical and analytical which usually appears in serious topics rather in non-serious topics which could be more subjective, descriptive and emotional.

It is supported also by their preference of information resources too. When talking about information resource, more than half of the participants mentioned they prefer to go online, searching related official news as their first-hand information. Many participants said that they would like to approach the official voice as the first-hand information, since they believe it is comparatively objective and reliable.

"*I usually go to big official media, as they are more reliable, for example Nangfang Daily, NetEase News and Xinhua News. I know them well including their news style, background, history, etc. I know I can trust them." (Suri)*

"To search for more information about the topic, I like to go online, watching news from some big official media, television and even newspapers. I know the information from the internet is relatively comprehensive, but very variable. They are not very reliable. But official media, such as CCTV, Xinhua News, they are very credible. Sometimes they may not say it all, but the things they say normally cannot be terribly wrong. So they are more trustworthy to me, and I pay more attention to them usually." (ZC)

As another important information access, quite a few participants mentioned, sometimes they tended to look for relevant information through online search engine.

"Normally I will read some news, news feeds etc. If I become especially interested, I'll search more information on Baidu. I prefer information objective than subjective. Usually I've already had my opinions when I looked up that information." (Wang LL)

"Sometimes you heard people talking about something that probably you don't really know the whole story. That's when I go searching some information on Baidu." (Linda)

A few of them also chose to use professional knowledge, books, in order to further develop their understandings.

"If I want to know something I'm not quite familiar with, I'd like to learn from some professional books. I prefer more professional information, presenting the facts and reasoning things out." (Wu Q)

"I'm not sure if that is just me, but I'd like to look up some relevant books and materials, even to learn some professional knowledge before I talk to anyone. And I would dodge to talk to people first. Probably it is because I prefer dry cargo information, namely using data and more objective information in communication." (Lv JH)

What comes to the fourth major information resource was social networks, such as Wechat (considered as Chinese version of Facebook), Sina Microblog (considered as the Chinese version of Twitter). From the interviews, almost all the participants said, reviewing some subjective information, analysis and personal comments, no matter they believe it or not, is a necessary step for triggering and developing their thought to understand more about the topic in the first place.

"First of all, I'd like to look up some related information online. At least I want to have a general idea about the topic, for example, the cause of the things, after, and the result is. Then I need to look at least two or three comments. Usually I don't make my conclusion right away." (Ma S)

"If there is something widely discussed by people, I'll look up some related news first. After I've known one or two about this topic, and usually when I feel there is probably something unusual going on, I'll want to see some comments and opinions. Just you will be curious about what other people think about it." (MTX)

"Normally I go to webo, or look up top research for relevant information, just searching around on." (2jin)

Therefore, as I learned from the interviews, the link between information-learning and online deliberation could be rather weak. Compared to news apps, the information found via search engine can be more diverse, comprehensive and individual-preferred, but also raw, loose and very diverse comparing to opinion-based information from social media. It largely depends on the preference of the participants. In this case as I noticed, most quiet participants prefer objective, factual and logical information. In fact, nearly two thirds participants mentioned that when they reviewed comments and replies, they have already had a general opinion in mind. Based on that, three quarts participants said they are attracted to opinions involving facts and objective information. Half of the participants would like to pay attention on analytic, logic and professional information. Only a few people mentioned they are interested in subjective information such as personal experience and value. As expected, therefore, most participants said, their opinions are usually not formed and changed easily by other people's opinions they see from the online forum.

"If I want to come out my own opinions, I would so some research, reading something from reliable, qualified websites…I don't usually search for comments or authoritative opinions stuff, mostly something like news reports and something professional enough. Those comments, opinions are just too personal and subjective for me." (Zhai HY)

"I'd rather prefer fact-based report. Those analysis and comments don't really make sense to me. I mean most of the comments are really subjective, emotional and very personal. I won't take them too serious." (Wang ZR)

"You know the comments are always ranked by "buzz". So, I usually only read the first few which are liked by most people, so called the top comments. They are normally provocative and all very similar. I intend not let those opinions influence mine." (Zhong R)

Instead, they mentioned that they tend to avoid information that is too ready-made, subjective, personal and authoritative, to make sure they can make their judgement independently without interference. Collecting information from social media, this approach could represent a higher standard of information-collecting and -processing ability, since it allows participants form their opinions in a relatively independent and rational position through consciously and independently learning. It requires people to be well organised in collecting, selecting and analysing information in their minds, to form their own opinions involving more autonomous thinking activities.

"The simplest way for me is to Google or Baidu the information. I will know pretty much about the event/topic by doing that. I always try to avoid some personal views in searching for information." (Wu Q)

"If I'm interested and want to know more, I'll search some information on Baidu. I usually would avoid that kind of opinion-directed information from other people." (Liu)

"To be honest, I'm not influenced by other people's opinions too much. It doesn't matter if they are celebrities or so called 'public intellectual'. I mean we are all well educated. We all have our own standards to make judgment, and ability to think and analyze. I don't want to be that kind of people who follow the herd. I get used to search information myself, and form the opinions based on my own understanding." (Guo W)

"Usually if I'm interested, I'd like to search more information myself first. By then, I should have an opinion already, which is based on the information and knowledge I've learned. So even though I could talk with other people, people who have different opinions from me, it won't easily change my opinion." (PSK)

Therefore, the information-learning process in which quiet participants form their original opinions, is not necessarily related to the online deliberation as an information base. The finding is echoed by what I have learned from the online materials that the online deliberation is mainly consist of subjective information. In other word, there is a reason to believe that the online opinion information from deliberation has very limited influence to opinion formation as a result to the quiet participants at this stage of developing considerations and forming their original opinions. However, I wonder if the online opinions, to any extent, have impact to their ability related to information absorption.

By talking to them, I realised that, in online communicative settings, they are almost impervious to other people's opinions at this stage, except for two occasions. The first of these is when they engage in discussion on topics which they are not really familiar with. Especially at the beginning, if they are not proactively engaged in online deliberation, "what other people are talking about", as the majority participants described it, can trigger their interest, encouraging them to search more, know more, and develop their own thoughts based on it:

"I also pay attention on opinion information from online forums. Usually that kind of information is processed based on some personal thoughts and experience. So, no matter it's good or not, it's another kind of thinking and reference for me to know 'ah! There is another different opinion like this!'. They might open your mind, or deepen your understanding in a way." (ZC).

I will go to some social media like microblog, online forum and Wechat for sure. I feel I need to see some subjective information - views, analysis, comments - that stuff, because I'm usually too lazy to think myself. I could be easily convinced by some opinion information at the beginning. However, once I read another piece which are some different ones from the former one, I would feel it actually makes sense too. That's the moment I'm encouraged to think harder. It's like a thought-provoking thing to me." (Wu QY)

"When you read news, you must have a feeling, like a basic general opinion based on your knowledge and experience along all the years. Then I will go to see some comments. It won't bother you until you find most of the comments are conflicted with your opinion. You would feel very curious and inexplicable. That makes you want to know more, like what you have missed, why there are so many people saying something different from you." (Shan L)

"Surely it's more like a passive process in the first beginning. There is so much information you can find online. No matter it's news or social media, I only click and read more if I'm interested in the topic. If I'm not satisfied with that information, want to know more, I will go online website, baidu or something. Some of the news is from official resource, but I always would like to know some opinions that are not so much official, for example from social media like weibo and wechat. I'm not saying I'd be more likely to believe them, but they will definitely inspire me with different angles and some unknown information." (Da S)

Although information from the internet can be temporary, superficial and unreliable, the online communicative settings enable some events, even not very significant at first, to become popular topics on everybody's agenda, which transforms them or related opinions into thought provoking discussions that make people want to know more. In that case, they want to know other people's opinions first, for inspiration, or to recognize where they are in the discussion, in order to relate back to what they have already known. It also could become the beginning of self-deliberate. The thinking process can help the participants prepare for engaging deliberation with their own opinions in the next step.

If there is an impact considered on information-learning to quiet participants in this stage, as I found in the interviews, it could get their opinions improved in a way further confirming and strengthening them. Such effect is firstly resulted from the communicative culture which has not been playing a good role in developing people's ability of accepting different opinions.

Having been influenced by the modesty and "face" culture, people are accustomed to being very cautious about dealing with different opinions, especially the negative ones. In the case of talking with strangers who have not yet built a relationship with, the Chinese modesty culture encourages people to avoid opinion-directed expression involving too much personal, emotional information. Besides, as we discussed earlier, Chinese "face" in offline communication can contribute to building good relationships between people who need to earn and maintain face. As a result, even in a disagreement between strangers, a positive response will always be the preference for Chinese people for making a good first impression, so they can be beneficial from good relationships by pleasing each other. Even when there is already a bond existing between people, expressing a different opinion up front still runs the risk of insulting and offending others in an offline social encounter. It is hard to imagine that direct criticism or argument could happen in the first conversation between people. Indeed, we can say, the face culture and the modesty concept have greatly helped to reduce the happening of unpleasant conflicts caused by different opinion expression in offline communications. At the same time, however, they also limit the opportunities and conditions training people as listeners to properly deal with objection and difference.

On the other side, the online communicative settings make different opinions inevitable. Such situation is especially a challenge when the participants have already formed their own opinions. Even though it is not saying that they will necessarily pay less attention to different opinions, it is more likely that they are largely challenged by the ability of being responsive and inclusive to those ones. As a result, it could mean that the quiet participants are more likely to be influenced by similar opinions rather than by the opposing ones.

As we learned from most participants in dealing with divergence, they prefer to shelve disputes rather than confront them right away both online and offline. For quiet participants, it is possible to voluntarily skip over those different opinions, paying more attention to similar ones, so their primary considerations thusly are strengthened and completed instead of being challenged at this stage of opinion formation.

Moreover, the fact that the quiet participants have the ability and conditions to make up their own minds by taking information from deliberation can make them a group of participants even harder to change their minds in later on self-expression-based deliberation. Especially in online settings, the disagreement is not just from one person, but means a group of people who hold

the similar opinions. To that point, it could also explain why they would not bother actively engaging in different-opinion-inclined deliberation.

"I try to read those comments with no intention to pursued people or to see how many people having the similar opinions with me. In that way, I feel I can learn more from other people. It's just so frustrated that, even though the opinion is good enough, very logical, evidential and informative, it is still disagreed by so many people. Of course, I appreciate there can be so many different opinions online, but what I'm saying is, to reach a consensus making everyone happen is impossible. I'd rather just watch other people discussing, or just read from the others to come to my own opinions, rather than communicating with them." (Michael)

"Usually if you've already have certain opinion and standpoint, reading other people's comments can only make you be more and more certain about your thought, because when you face so much information online, you can always choose those opinions only you would like to read and accept to make you feel you are the right one." (Huang XB)

""When I come across different opinions online, I would be perfectly fine for them to stay that way, because I will still reservations too. Everybody can have different opinions, right? Compare to those different ones, which I would probably slide over, I think I pay more attention on those similar ones. I would read and like it to show my support even. If there is anything I know, I would add more. I feel even though I could look at those different opinions like for once, twice, three times, I would not pay consistent attention, because I know they are not correct." (Papa)

Another situation mentioned in the interviews as a moment when it is easy for people to take opinion information from others is when they ask for it. In this case, opinions are more likely to be given in a form of suggestions, advice based on personal experience and knowledge. Many participants said they would automatically seek for opinions when they need help. On this occasion, the participants normally pay more attention, and feel more open-minded about taking other's opinions. Unless, in cases like this, they are not in a "totally have no idea" situation, but happens after the very careful self-deliberation. Most of them "have no idea", because they have been already giving it too much thought, and know very well about the relevant issues, which leaves them with a dilemma. As a result, they are usually more critical, specific, strict and demanding about selecting and taking others' opinions and information.

"For example, I used to talk about which milk powder is better, domestic or imported. You would have an opinion preference if you've done your homework earlier. So, unless you have really strong reasons, being really convincing, you won't be able to change my idea." (Zheng XJ)

"I used to post, but not so much. For example, back at that time when I got my scores of University Entrance Examination, I had no idea which school I should apply to. But you know the answers you got online were not something you expected. Actually, most people would not really think from your perspective and situation. So, when I saw those opinions, I felt they were really unreliable. After a few experiences like that, I decided not to require opinions online anymore." (Wu QY)

Therefore, even though they are more open-minded, and willing to have themselves exposed in more multi-perspective and diverse opinions, they could, at the same time, set higher standards for what opinion information they will take. By talking to the participants, I found that the information absorption in this case can be largely based on their personal preferences involving personal experience and emotions：

"For example, my SAT result is 690. I wasn't sure which university I should apply. I was so blind and knew very little about university application. I posted online asking for advices. It felt like I shifted the burden to somebody else, so I can be relieved. But the answer you were expected can be really different from what you get from the reality. I remember most of the answers were not very responsible, I just didn't feel they were reliable. I also have replied to people like that. It mostly based on my own experience and feelings." (Wu QY)

"Some posts for me don't make sense at all, probably out of two reasons. One is, I don't really know this topic, not something I've experienced for example, so I have very limited understanding about it. Another one is, people just simply make it up, talking nonsense there. So, for me, good posts are those which includes information I can use, related to my experience and life, making me resonate to it. Otherwise, it is written with true feelings and good attitudes." (Wang ZR)

"In that situation I'd pay much more attention on people's comments, for example those interesting ones. I mean some opinions are inspiring enough. Also, opinions involve values that can touch me from the bottom of the heart. Sometimes if it can reflect some sort of attitude about the posters that I appreciate, I can find it very attractive too." (Lao X)

5.3.2.2 Information-giving

5.3.2.2.1 The irrelevance and inhibition of text-based opinion expression

Considering from the aspect of information-giving, it is necessary to point out that the contribution of quiet participants is not text-based. The engagement of this group in online text-based expression can be very limited. Going through the interviews, I have learned all the concerns that quiet participants have about sharing their opinions in the written form online, including irrelevance, online flaming, trust issue (anonymity for example), information overload, publicity, invisibility and asynchronized interaction. All these factors have largely hindered their online expressive activities. Among them, the one mentioned the most is irrelevance. Nearly two thirds of the participants thought "it is none of my business" is the main reason why they were not so actively expressing their opinions online.

However, same as other online active participants, the quiet participants pay close attention to online deliberation. Learned from the interviews, they usually engage in a non-textual way of expression, and mostly have positive feedbacks to online deliberation in general. However, when it comes to text-based opinion expression, 20 out of 30 participants showed the "irresponsible" attitude of standing aloof from things on the ground that they are no concern of

theirs. That makes me wonder, how can we explain such feeling of irrelevance they have? What is the related deliberative thought and attitude behind?

By analyzing the preference of information usage for the quiet participants, I found that they generally have high standard to collect and select the information they will use in deliberation. This makes them a group not very active in expressing online, because they always feel that they are not ready yet. According to the interviews, fact-based information and professional knowledge are considered as hard to use in reasoning process. On the other hand, personal experience is the easiest type of information. However, for quiet participants, the easy information was surprisingly not usually widely used for opinion expression. The reason, as most participants mentioned, is that such information is preferred in offline conversations between acquaintances, but not as much as convincing with strangers in public online sphere such as online forum.

"I barely use my own experience in online discussions. I tend to speak with statistics, factual evidence and logic if I want to post it online. If it's not a topic that can be talked about with knowledge, statistics, I would probably use experience. But in that case, I would express differently depending on who I'm talking to." (Wu Q)

"I feel the easiest information is something well-known by people. For example, you have your opinions, you could support them with some experience, some common sense everybody knows. People wouldn't question you for that, because you are your own authority. However, I haven't really done that online. I always feel it's too weird to talk about my experience there with strangers. Or maybe I could, depends on who I'm talking to. I think the way I express online is more subjective, speaking based on facts." (Huang XB)

At the same time, hard information is not a popular option either. It is mainly the cost-benefit issue involving the time and effort consumed by information collection, selection and analysis, comparing to the effect and the influence they expect to earn from online expression.

"Usually if you talk about things in a way closer to daily life, using experience people all have been through would make it more understandable. And using more common information like that, you can also get more comments and replies. Information that involves professional knowledge and factual data is hard to manage. It is time-consuming really, and not well known by everyone. (Linda)

"I think the discussion offline is beneficial to my social relationship, to achieve some goals with it, or to help with your work in some way. But online discussion is only people expressing ideas to strangers. You gain nothing more than just some useless information…To be good, I think you need to put effort, time and passion to remain a good interaction and a communicative relationship, but in virtual world, I can't even have a basic sense about who I'm talking to. So, I just don't feel I need to invest my time and energy to do that." (Chen YD)

"I only discuss topics I'm familiar with, because I need to put thought into it. Like science, you need to reason, verify. Social topics are more subjective. You need to do more to make your opinion convincing enough to all other people. If it is not really my interest, I don't feel like I need to spend all the effort and time on that." (PSK)

Considering a topic may grow exponentially in a very short time through information-sharing and -liking, connecting the scattered individual participants who have the same or similar opinions, it can merge individual discursive power with public opinion in deliberation. However, as individual opinion expresser, people are not usually aware of the influence and change one can make by expressing oneself in public. In fact, it is also true that the online world is drowning in information overload. Nothing can grab the attention for too long. People will always jump from one topic to another. It kills the expectation of individual participants, making the personal voice feel less meaningful.

"Things cannot change with one person's effort you have to realise that, even by many of us. I guess I'm just a more realistic person at this point than average people. I only invest my energy in things I can have an influence on. Otherwise, I don't want to waste my time." (Guo W)

"I will defend my own opinions when come to divergence, because I know in most cases, persuading won't work at all. Compared to investing your time and energy persuading others, I'd rather spread my opinions as much as possible. If you have some experience discussing online, you would know that some opinions people know for a reason. I'm saying it is there because somebody wants you to see it. The Online world is a world that only cares whose voice is louder. You may put your effort, investing your time to persuade other people for hours, but you realise it is barely appreciated. The influence is not as close as someone showing their face on TV for a few minutes. Of course, it will make you feel frustrated and meaningless. So, there is not much choice except being one of the silent majorities online for me." (Wu Q)

In many cases, things that count for each group member's effort to benefit all individual member through collective action are usually more difficult to achieve, because inevitably everyone may be influenced by free-rider psychology. The group of quiet participants is not an exception. Since the internet offers an efficient interactive stage for people communicating with a wider range of strangers at any time or place, everybody can present their own individual values through equal and free expression. However, communication between the public online cannot usually meet the needs of such diverse interests. Neither are there any regulations in the virtual public sphere that operate as a general bonding force for value integration. In this case, expression is more likely to take the maximum individual discursive interest in conflict. Even if people do not tend to stand aside in the first place, when free-riding becomes a trendsetting example, showing its "advantage" of costing less but gaining more, it becomes a great frustration and burden for the responsible few who must bear the overwhelming cost of taking action. They not only need to manage, but also require the ability to manipulate, more

information and knowledge, being able to create powerful and influential discourse, mobilizing values, emotion, ideas and morality through interactive online communication, that is sometimes inefficient, and has an unsatisfactory outcome. As a result, without a definite agenda and goal connecting each individual participant to collective discursive action, it is difficult to not involve one's individual rationality by calculating the costs and benefits of online expressive behaviour. So, for most quiet participants, engaging online expression is not a good deal. They would rather only to have a general idea instead of investing time and effort in opinion information integration.

5.3.2.2.2 Being responsive: A forcing learning process

However, as I discovered from the interviews, for most quiet participants in online deliberation, impulsive expression can be stimulated by the eagerness of earning face, to build up a positive image being accepted and appreciated through expressive actions. The Chinese face culture, in that way, is believed to indirectly improve the quality and quantity of information created in online deliberation. This embodied two features: situational and interactive. According to Wang and Zhang (2015), speakers will position themselves according to the communicative environment, processing the cognitive response based on it, and create the perception that is combined with one's own cognitive system, finally presenting the reaction through language. This reaction will be evaluated by the audience. Meanwhile, speakers need to consistently adjust the image according to the evaluations, improving their position and cognition, which forms a sort of communicative relationship, which may further benefit or harm one's face (Zhang, 2015). Similar to the offline communicative environment, earning face through building an online discursive image is determined by the surrounding situation and the interaction with other people too. The difference is that it is presented only in the form of words.

Although online communicative settings enable people to shape any image, being anyone they want to be in the virtual world, they will only earn face when their image is accepted by the audience. At this point, text-based expression makes positive image establishment (earning face) harder for the quiet participants. This is first of all because the online communicative environment is much more open and public. For quiet participants, it means that they are facing more diverse audiences, which makes meeting the taste of every audience an impossible task to complete. Secondly, concerning individual opinions can be more easily accessed and judged online, as much as I noticed, quiet participants usually set the bar very high for opinion

expression. It is to say, once they decided to put their opinions into words, expressing online, the face-earning will give them great motivation for discursive image management.

As I was trying to understand the expressive behaviours and thoughts of the quiet participants, a sense of responsibility can be detected in this situation. In theory, the online settings allow participants separate the activity of expressing from that of responding. Expressing refers only to the activity of "speaking out" without being concerned about any feedback or responses coming afterwards. As such, online-expressing can be a one-off deal, which costs participants less than two-ways communication. On the other hand, responding is a kind of expression done out of being recognised, or is expected to have persuasive influence on other people. To do such, it needs the participants to invest more effort and time. It also can be a challenge for their ability, and their face-remaining.

Based on the known online deliberative experience of most participants, the appropriate expressive strategy of giving face in offline communicative settings, is rather rarely applied in online settings. There are usually two approaches for face-giving in offline communication. One is that people avoid publicly criticizing others. The other is that people are expected to use euphemism and ambiguous words when criticism has to happen (Hwang, 1987). However, neither of these is very applicable in an online public forum style deliberation. In relation to the former, the online public sphere is more public, open and diverse and difference of opinion is inevitable. In such a situation, as we discussed earlier, self-expression is treated as participants' top priority. Secondly, euphemism and vagueness are not usually the first choice of response in heated exchanges. And any intentional expression of different opinions can hardly fail to be read as face-threatening in the absence of affective bonding cultivated via a rhetorical strategy. This challenges participants to use other approaches to adjust and manage their image in order to earn and save "face".

As I further investigated the interviews, I found a few gestures that quiet participants use to "save face" in offline communications. Making a concession is a common one (namely avoid criticizing publicly). Also, they could change the subject, or quit the conversation. Such gestures could only mean making a concession in strategy. This points to the instrumental side of "face" communication in China, namely people build and remain good social relationship by avoiding public criticism and antagonism out of the favour of face-saving. Usually, such communication is preferred, to cater to "experience", but cannot be well fulfilled in "memories",

which are the feelings we have learned by later integrating our past experience with an outsider perspective. For some people, such "harmonious" communication can hardly benefit a substantial acquisition of information. Although it can reduce the risk of heated or unpleasant argument by suppressing the different opinions, it also largely limits the opinion expression in general, especially the diverse information involved in the conversation, the chance and effort people take to prove themselves by persuading others with more effective information and to improve their own opinions through learning from each other in deliberation.

Unlike offline settings, there are four approaches mentioned in the interviews that the quiet participants prefer to apply in online communication to save face, including dropping out of the discussion, turning to humour or sarcasm, continuing arguing, and making concessions. Dropping out of the discussion was the most common one, while making concessions is the least. For them, withdrawing from a discussion which is getting ugly can effectively avoid further unnecessary negative feelings, but at the same time still maintain their stance. This points to the phenomenon that they are being "quiet" most of time.

"If there is a disagreement, I'd want to know why the other thinks differently from me. If I feel I can explain myself and capable to persuade them, I'll do that. But if I sense this is not going anywhere, for example the discussion is not very pleasant, people are getting personal and abusive, I will stop responding." (Wang ZR)

"I'll express myself online. Sometimes I keep it very short. If somebody is interested, we can have a further discussion, for example I could explain myself more. But if they are just some people who know nothing but only care about saying nonsense, I don't bother to explain too much. Usually I'll just say whatever I want to say and leave." (Tina)

"I usually can sense whether this conversation is going to turn into something ugly. I personally don't like telling my opinions in a very sharp, aggressive and critical way. Some of my friends do. I don't. So, if their opinions are very different, the way they say it is not very nice, I'd like to avoid any possible conflicts by simply, very generally expressing what I think, or just stop responding, but I won't just agree with them because of that." (Wang LL)

But no matter which situation they end up in, the shared understanding is, once they engage in opinion expression, most of quiet participants tend to use as much as evidential information in discussions rather than only see it as a simple claim or emotional outburst. As learned from the interviews, most of the quiet participants intuitively connected opinion-expressing to its potential influence in the two-way communicative model.

"I rarely have the desire to show my opinions to people, because I always have a long self-critical process ahead. I would ask myself like, are you sure you know what it is? are you sure what you think is correct? are you sure you know the whole story? Basically, after such knee-jerk self-criticism, I lose all my intention to tell people about my opinions." (Zhai HY)

"My learning process is quite independent. After I learned enough, I discuss with people. In fact, it's because I'm too afraid of saying some stupid, something wrong. I don't want to make a fool of myself. It would be too humiliated." (Gao YL)

"I only want to share my opinions when I feel I've known well about this topic, and had some developed understandings myself, which could bring some contribution to this deliberation. Normally, if I'm not sure the opinions are well developed, I'll learn first, from other people online, or search some relevant information." (Yang P)

At this point, responding presents a sense of responsibility in opinion expression for being recognised, or in expectation that it will have persuasive influence on other people. For this to happen, the information providers must invest more effort and time. It can also challenge and train their ability of information management. This "responsibility" that is understood with the Chinese face culture is more intuitive and compulsive. Once quiet participants decide to express themselves, the procedure of image-building begins, which requires them to burden with more pressure in the process. To perform better, achieving persuasive influence, quiet participants are usually very demanding about the information they use for expressing their opinions online. That could explain why they always feel "not ready" yet.

Therefore, even though the response of online quiet participants is intuitive and compulsive, it can result in a high degree of information-learning and self-regulation. Since they like to fully prepare, being recognised and influential through discussing opinions online. Especially when they are unfamiliar with the topic, they demand themselves to behave on a professional level, which usually requires a tough and serious learning process. In the interviews, as a result, such time and effort investment in online communication is not considered as a good deal. Even though, the quiet participants cannot help being driven by the stronger motivation under the circumstance, not only collecting and learning relevant professional information and knowledge, investing time in thinking and analysing, but also learning how to use them for better interpretation and discussion, in order to impress and persuade other people in a very short time.

"If I want to talk something that I'm not very familiar with, I'll learn some basic ideas in this field, including their language style and wording logics. I'll firstly try to understand that. Starting from that, I'll understand how some typical ideas developed with relevant knowledge. Moreover, I would like to read some professional books. Not promise I can understand totally, but I like to arm myself with more professional knowledge when I talk about something unfamiliar to me." (Wu Q)

"I would be very happy if I can impress you with my "knowledge". But I have to be cautious, because if I want to do that, for example throwing to you an opinion you just cannot argue with, I need to make sure it's right! It would be extremely embarrassing if I found out I was wrong all the time. So, every time I feel like I need to do this, I pile up as much knowledge, factual information and logic as I can. But you know, the problem is I'm not a

knowledgeable person on many topics. I'm just trying to be one. So, I have to put much effort into collecting and learning things. That makes the expression happen not so easily." (Zhao JH)

Chapter VI Talking Online Deliberation on the Moral Level: The social and communicative context

In this chapter we focus on two aspects, the establishment of sentiment relationships and the value of harmony, and outline the basic understanding of morality that has largely shaped communicative behaviour and thinking in Chinese communicative culture and social tradition. We consider online deliberation in the light of these cultural values, in combination with two characteristics of the online setting: invisibility and minimization of status and authority. This will lead us towards a consideration of how and to what extent online settings have changed Chinese deliberative behaviours and thinking at the moral level, which will lay a foundation for the analysis of a concrete set of deliberation practices in the next chapter.

6.1 Talking about the Chinese deliberative context from the moral perspective

In his 1987 work *Face and Favor: The Chinese Power Game*, Hwang developed a conceptual framework based on Chinese social culture to explain the everyday social interactive mechanism of Chinese people. To illustrate the foundation on which this social mechanism builds, he introduced three concepts based on the Chinese language system and traditions: Renqing (人情 in Chinese); guanxi (关系 in Chinese); and mianzi (面子 in Chinese) (Hwang, 1987: 946). Hwang considered these three concepts and the correlation between them to be the social foundation of everyday communicative interaction between Chinese people, in particular of a great part of social life – ways of thinking about managing social resources through social activities. Inspired by his work, this section will trace the moral qualities of an everyday communicative setting by considering two of Hwang's concepts (as we have introduced face culture – mianzi - earlier in this thesis), in the context of conflict. This will offer a background that helps us to better understand Chinese people's deliberative behaviours and thinking in a moral sense.

6.1.1 *Renqing Guanxi*: The sentimental value-based relationship in Chinese context

To some extent, deliberative relationship can be understood as conflict-handling communicative behaviour, demined by a series of personal preferences and orientations that are strongly influenced by the cultural factors and values to which people are attached (Kirkbride, et al., 1991). Such a communicative relationship is literally translated as Guanxi

(关系). However, in Chinese culture, this has different social meanings from the English understanding. Hwang (1997) considered the Chinese notion of Guanxi to consist of two parts: an expressive component and an instrumental component. In his definition, the expressive component denotes the extent of affective attachment in a relationship. This can nourish, and in turn influence people to try to maintain the relationship. The instrumental component indicates the major goal for people to socially interact with one other, namely using the relationship as an instrument to acquire certain resources (Hwang, 1997: 20).

The expressive part of Guanxi, or expressive ties as described by Hwang (1997), is rooted first of all in the Confucian ethical system as the idea of Lun (King, 1991). Lun describes basic relationships we have with each other that make us human (Chen and Chen, 2004). In Confucius' social hierarchical arrangements, Chinese people are defined by five basic intimate social relationships: father-son, husband-wife, brother-brother, sister-sister and friend-friend relationships (Zhang, 2015; Jin, 1992). These five relationships are considered to be the core social bonds by which Chinese people are socialised from birth. People identify their specific social position by relying on and developing those five basic intimate ties (Leung and Wong, 2001; Jin, 1994; Yang, 1994). Confucian culture further advocates 'Ren' (benevolence) as the moral basis on which to build Guanxi with other people. And this sense of intimacy can be seen as one of the standards used to measure the extent of expressive ties, because ideally this sort of relationship is understood to be based simply on love and affection, and not on material or instrumental intentions (Zhai, 2004). People within this group of relationships, also known as the "in-group", can usually make deals between each other more easily than with people outside the group (Wong and Chan, 1999). The affective bonding embodied in communicative relationships is especially valuable and powerful when it operates in situations of conflict, as mutual understanding and trust are more likely to be cultivated between people who are already emotionally interactive and acquainted (Fishkin et al., 2005). Such affective relationships, built through communication, also direct the way Chinese people interact with each other (Li and Liang, 2002), and can be used to avoid discomfiture or emotionally irreconcilable conflict (Chen and Chung, 1994).

Another aspect of understanding communicative relationships in China is what Hwang (1997) described as the "instrumental component" which has a utilitarian logic in the Chinese communicative context. Instrumental ties are the main presentation of the Guanxi (relationship)

web for Chinese people outside the "vertical" relationship line, namely family relationships such as father-son and husband-wife (Hwang, 1997). In such relationships, the effort people invest in remaining in the relationship is more likely to be defined from a purposive perspective. For example, as Brunner et al. (1989) noticed, activities such as gift-giving, wine and dinner can be used in the Chinese approach to every social life to establish or maintain relationships with people outside of the in-group/ relationship web. The nature of such relationships, and their underlying intentions, are more instrumental. As in a transaction, the relationship-accepter would like to build up the relationship with the relationship-seeker for their mutual benefit. In this case, the gift-giving action is not usually read as an immoral one (as in corruption, for example), since it meets the expectations of traditional Chinese communicative culture, of "Li" (courtesy). In Chinese understanding, courtesy demands reciprocity, on which social interaction is built.

Although there is a chance that such social action is not intended, or intensive enough, to build affective bonds, the core of reciprocity in Chinese context is not totally material, but involves moral consideration of "Li". For example, as Chen and Chen (2004a) pointed out, the Chinese idea of reciprocity is dynamic and has a long-term orientation, which means that it is not exactly evaluated by equal-value exchange, or something with a one-time pay-off. On the contrary, immediate payback is usually considered a shortsighted and stupid way to establish relationships (Yang, 1994). Chinese people believe that every effort people invest in maintaining and strengthening these relationships will transfer to "favours" (also known as Renqing in the Chinese context). Such efforts should be appreciated by paying back the favour many times over to show you know how to be grateful (Zhai, 2004; Fei, 1992). This is one example that shows how communicative relationships are built up with Li. However, the reciprocity principle is not necessarily valued if the relationship is mainly instrumental, especially when it functions only in the very short term. For example, relationships built in a business-to-business environment, as Leung and Wong (2001) discovered, are not usually set up with mutual benefit as their priority, but using a strategy of opportunism, dynamic business interaction and protectionism. For establishing such instrumental relationships, Li is important rather in the sense of avoiding people's desire being developed too wildly at the cost of the relationship.

So, what is the moral meaning of Li as a guiding rule for building Chinese communicative relationships? For one thing, in the Confucian system Li is interpreted as destiny; that is, as a

guiding rule for building communicative relationships, it is something given and irresistible. We can make sense of Li by tracking it from its early definition in Chinese history as sacrificial ceremony and performance. The meaning of such activities is to show that people understand their mission, follow their destiny, and accepting the arrangement (Zhai, 2004). Li means to be empowered by former emperors and saints in the name of destiny/heaven. Namely, people's desires, emotions and behaviours must be regulated by the authority of heaven. The Chinese put a high value on obeying the natural order of the universe, even though it is hard sometimes, and good fortune will always reward those who obey. This enhances Chinese people's ability to accept fate, and their respect for social hierarchy (Chen, et al., 2005), and is strongly reflected in their law-abiding and conformist character (see more in Jin et al., 2009).

More importantly, Li is related to other relationship-building values in communicative culture. Ren, for example, in general known as human excellence, can be literally translated as benevolence in English. In a narrow sense, it can be considered on the dimension of people affectively managing their communicative relationships with others. In building relationships, Ren refers to a moral standard. It educates people to handle the expressive and the instrumental parts of a relationship with tolerance, kindness and appreciation (Lv, 2016), and is usually the source of the closeness cultivated in a relationship. "Yi" is another closely-related moral standard, that can be understood as ties of comradeship, a reaction to a social hierarchy of honour. As Hwang (2002) explained, it points to the kind of affective feeling people have in a relationship in which they respect and admire someone according to their social or family hierarchy of honour.

In Chapter 20 of *Zhong Yong*, we are given a standard protocol for how relationships should be well managed, in the Chinese sense, with "Li", by considering those moral values: "亲亲之杀，尊贤之等，礼所生也". This means: "Li" is embodied in managing the closeness of the relationship with Ren, and the hierarchy of the relationship with Yi. This principle educates people to treat others and handle things by considering their roles in relationships with other people from two perspectives: the closeness of the relationship with others and the hierarchy or pecking order. The closeness of a relationship, on the one hand, should be handled by Ren. On the other, people position themselves in a hierarchy by comparing themselves with others at the level of self-cultivation, talent and social position, namely according to Yi. In practice, people choose proper communication strategies by considering those moral standards,

and react specifically according to the communication rule, namely the Li principle (Hwang, 2002). In Confucian understanding, the rules and sentiment embodied in Li are inseparable. The ideal case is to when rules and courtesy operate in conjunction with sentiment in dealing with relationships with each other. There are many sayings in China, that interpret this point. For example, "he Qing he Li" (being fair and sensible) and "tong Qing da Li" (being emotionally understanding and amenable to reason). These indicate the extent to which sentiment is also vitally important when handling relationships with rules and courtesy.

6.1.2 The value of harmony

6.1.2.1 The Chinese harmony value as 'difference'

The very basis of harmony in the Chinese context is the understanding of difference. It can be interpreted as an internal mechanism for coordinating difference created by Chinese culture. It is described by analogy with a melody. Confucian culture sees music as analogous to harmony as the process of bringing different tones and sounds into a concerted whole. The ancient scholar-minister Yan Zi (?-500 BCE) used to model the harmony system with music, saying that,

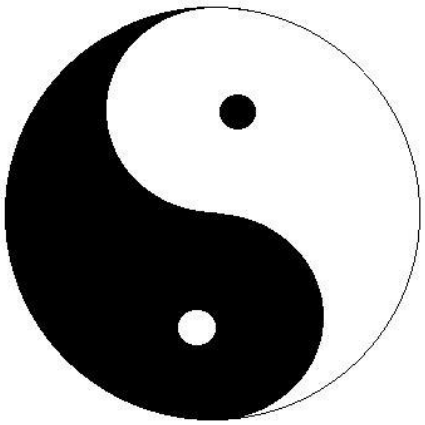
> "Music, as much as flavors have different ingredients completing one another, has different sounds complementing one another: the pure and the impure, the big and the small, the short and the long, the rapid and the measured, the sorrowful and the joyful, the strong and the tender, the slow and the fast, the high and the low, the in and the out, and the inclusive and the non-inclusive. Listening to this kind of music can purify one's soul, and cultivate one's mind to become a good person (Junzi)".

As beautiful music, harmony is supposed to mix different elements to generate a pleasant and compatible whole. It is achieved through equilibrium (Li, 2008), although this does not imply a fixed pattern, but a more dynamic balance. Chinese culture believes the world is constantly changing and is full of contradictions. To understand one side of the story, people need to learn how to appreciate and understand the existence of the opposite side. For example, in Chinese thinking what seems to be true in the current situation may not be correct in the future. This logic is well explained in Taoism by Yin and Yang theory. Yin refers to the feminine, dark and negative side of the world, while Yang refers to the opposite, masculine, light and active side. One side exists only because the of the other. If you rotate the Yin-Yang picture quickly enough (see below, Table 1), you will find Yin (the black part) is in Yang (the white part), and vice

versa. In that sense, the Chinese concept of harmony educates people how to recognize differences from a perspective of development or change, and then to find ways to bring together, unite and co-ordinate all difference in development. As discussed in section 22 of *Zhong Yong:*

> "Only once people recognize their own nature and the nature of others, can they assist with the transforming and nourishing process of the harmony of heaven and earth, and finally form a triad by becoming part of it".[17]

Table 1. Yin-Yang Symbol



This also reveals what Rosenberg (2006) has noticed, the role that the community as a whole plays in Chinese harmony culture. This is especially the case when the Chinese deal with each other, regarding themselves as players "in a collectively orchestrated symphony of social exchange" (Rosenberg, 2006: 81). In that light, the spirit of "collectivism" in the Chinese context is used to combine and balance the needs of the individual and the needs of the group. In the Chinese understanding, they are not in conflict with one another. For most of the time, what Chinese people believe makes an individual good and function well in the group, is a good harmonious community (Yan, 2005). As a result, the Chinese usually tend to define themselves in a group context, by the relationships they have with other people, and to look upon things from the perspective of the collective rather than the individual. In other words, harmony is created by making partial changes. The norm of Chinese society, in that sense, encourages people to rely on their surroundings, and teach themselves to identify with the

[17] See Chinese original version at: http://edba.ncl.edu.tw/ChijonTsai/CEN/cen.htm [Access on: 5th April, 2017].

group, even for the purpose of achieving individual goals. Sometimes, this change even means giving up their own standpoint (Guo, 2004).

6.1.2.2 Self-reflection in Chinese harmony

One moral meaning embodied in Chinese harmony is achieved, in Confucian philosophy, by valuing self-reflection over man's subjective initiative. For example, in Analects, Confucians take the concept of harmony to morally define Junzi, who is considered to be the moral ideal of a human being, saying: "Junzi seeks harmony but not sameness. Otherwise, villains seek only sameness but never harmony." It means that, to be a Junzi, people should be able to keep an open mind for differences, and be willing to work with others to achieve harmony based on them. Harmony, then, is not something that can be easily found, but which demands effort, especially efforts at self-cultivation. Unlike western thinking, in Confucianism such self-cultivation is not to gain more influence over, or to creatively remold their surroundings, but connects to inner peace. Inner peace is interpreted as internal harmony, which is inseparably constituted by the mental and the physical. Both are presented in a balanced system called "Qi" (which can be translated as life energy or life force). According to Chapter 77 of *Chun Qiu Fan Lu*, the good character of human beings contributes to a pleasant frame of mind and attitude, which makes qi flow harmoniously and freely within the human body for physical fitness. Negative emotions, such as anxiety, wrath, envy and pride, on the other hand, could upset the flow and balance, which is harmful to both physical and mental health. Therefore, harmony in Chinese culture refers not only to being in harmony with others, but also to internal harmony from self-discipline and -cultivation to achieve a harmonious inner state of mind.

In relation to interpersonal relationship-building, Confucianism believes that self-cultivation is essential for achieving harmonious relationships between people by achieving the inner peace. As Confucius said, if you meet someone of virtue, you should learn from him, and try to catch up. If you meet someone without values and morals, it is necessary to self-reflect by drawing a lesson from him, to see if you have similar problems. Here, the action promoted by Confucian is not to point out the other's mistakes, so that he can learn a lesson. Instead, it is self-reflection. The Junzi is defined as someone who understands self-reflection as "being strict with oneself, and being more tolerant of others". To pursue physical and mental harmony inside, Confucians set a very high standard for self-reflection, but there is little demanded for behaviours such as correcting or criticizing others. The idealist and educator, Heng Xu (1209-1281), once commented that if someone really understands and appreciates the value of self-reflection and

works on it, they will be too busy to pick up other people's mistakes. Traditional Chinese culture understands that expressing negative opinions about others, no matter whether this is justified or not, must come after strict self-evaluation. One only has the right to blame or accuse others when they make sure their own behaviour and moral conduct are perfect. According to Menci, if people who regulate themselves as Junzi, must ask themselves if they themselves are being rude and heartless, and if this is the reason that people are being so villainous. If they have done nothing rudely or heartlessly, they will be able to tell themselves when facing someone rude and haughty that people like that are just madmen who are nothing more than beasts. And there is no reason for a human being to bother talking to a dog. Consequently, in Chinese harmony culture, expressing opposition, whether to reproach or correct, is not encouraged.

6.1.2.3 Hierarchical order in Chinese harmony

Furthermore, the concept of harmony at the social level means teaching people to respect the hierarchy and order of society. As it says in the Analects of Confucius, “礼之用，和为贵，先王之道斯为美”, which means: in the application of rites, harmony should be prized, and this is the excellent quality prescribed by the ancient Kings. Whereas in ancient Chinese society, the main social relationships between people were formed according a fixed hierarchy system consisting of superiors and inferiors, gentle and simple, older and younger, nearness and distance as the basic standards (Yan, 2005), the governance rule for Confucians is to maintain order with Li, namely to coordinate and harmonize relationships between each level in society, and make sure people stay where they are. This ensures that society operates in a harmonious and united whole. Thus, “order” is the core content of the whole harmony system. The educator Cheng Zi (1033-1107) pointed out that harmony would not exist in any way if we deviate from Yin or Yang (the two opposing principles in nature), but it would be chaos; human beings would not exist unless they define themselves as “Zhong”; they would only be animals and beasts. This shows us the strength of Chinese harmony, which is referred to as “Zhong”. Zhong is visualized as ‘the centre’ in the context of the Chinese language. Citing from The Doctrine of the Mean, “Zhong” is defined as something more than just a location which does not lean to either side. In Chinese minds, if people avoid extreme emotions, such as being enormously happy or very sad, their heart will be in the "middle" (a mild place) and well balanced. Harmony then can be achieved by maintaining that order. The concept of Zhong is inseparable from the idea of harmony, because only once Zhong (the centre) is located, can the other parts fall into

place; harmony thus be achieved. Confucianism therefore emphasises this position, and the order people create by guarding and remaining in their social position. As the saying goes: as a monarch, he devoted himself to humanity and justice; as a minister at court, he devoted himself to respecting his sovereign; as a son, he devoted himself to filial obedience; as a father, he devoted himself to affection; as a friend, he devoted himself to honesty and trustworthiness. Chinese used “止”, meaning to stop something where it should be stopped, to draw a clear line between each basic social role, to tell people to be who they are supposed to be, to stop where they should stop.

The perspective of harmony also has roots in the later social principle for Chinese people to find themselves in the relationship with the others. As Xunclus (BC313- BC238) pointed out, “明分使群”. This means individuals have to be aware of their social roles, social division, and social class, so their behaviour can be ordered and regulated properly by social norms, for the purpose of the harmonious running of society as a whole. This creates Chinese style sociability (Zhao, 2015). However, unlike the western understanding, sociability in the Chinese context is more than a human instinct for naturally associating with others for one’s own good. It also restricts and guides personal development from within the frame of collective development with a series of ethics and moral disciplines, including patriarchal ideas, loyalty, filial, and hierarchical ideas. To a great extent, it actually limits personal development to a great extent. According to Shen’s (2005) understanding, individual development is largely related to the extent which you can socially fit in to a group - so called “Ren Yuan” in Chinese. As a result, the Chinese follow the principle of Zhong Yong. Zhong, as we discussed earlier, means somewhere in the middle. This can be developed to have a broader meaning that points to the level of attainment people manage - either too much, or too little, or just right. Yong, as we discussed in relation to the Chinese concept of modesty, means mediocrity. In Chinese culture, it sometimes means to be presented as worse than the average. Together, Zhong Yong educates people to learn that the best way to get along with others is to always perform on the same level as the others in the group. It points in two directions: not falling behind too badly, and more even importantly, not being too far ahead of people either. In the Chinese mind, individuals whose behaviour stands out are much more "dangerous", because they are easier targets for public criticism (Shen, 2005). Consequently, the Chinese have to resort to some strategies for being liked by other people by being Zhong yong, for example by pretending to be deaf and dumb, turning a blind eye, or just being a yes man (Zhai, 2004). Especially in a conflict

situation, Chinese people either choose to do nothing, or barely show their position, in an effort to not offend anybody (Shen, 2005).

6.2 The online deliberative setting from a moral perspective

Grice (2002) stated the cooperative principle that "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p. 45). This rule of being cooperative in a conversation basically gives the idea that conversation requires effort. People need to work at a conversation together, trying to achieve mutual understanding, contribute to the topic, and make efficient and active interaction, in order to maintain a good communication. Otherwise, any communication would fall apart. Such cooperative relationship-building in communication basically involves two aspects, which are, as Flores and James (2012) pointed out, thinking that focuses on the self, and considering the potential effects of one's actions on others. A model of morality in communication, is someone who is capable of being aware of the social and communicative surroundings, and accordingly meets others' expectations of them. After discussing the individual, in this section I turn to focus on the "communicative environment" in this section.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) can cause "disequilibrium" in the development of morality compared to traditional face-to-face communication. For example, it drives online relationships more and more in two extreme directions: serious convergence, when the self is completely immersed in the group; and severe alienation, when someone wants to be conspicuous, separate from the group and the effect of others (Willard, 1998). Therefore, in this section, to better understand the deliberative behaviour of Chinese people in a moral sense, more online deliberative settings will be discussed at the level of communicative relationship-building. This will help us to figure out some significant differences between the online and traditional face-to-face settings, and see how they affect the way people choose to communicate.

6.2.1 Invisibility

In Derks et al.'s (2008) work, invisibility is defined, as an inevitable fact existing in most CMC. It means a situation in which one is less aware of the social presence of partners to the interaction, since CMC is characterized as mainly textual, and lacks the social norms and controls of offline traditional face-to-face communication (Bargh, et al., 2002; Caplan, 2003). Thus, social presence in CMC is recognized by degrees of perception, awareness, recognition

and acknowledgement (Lapidot-Lefler and Barak, 2012). In online settings, we cannot access non-verbal factors such as age, skin color, gender, appearance and behaviour, the clues we use to build the communicative relationship are based on mainly on the textual content. One of the advantages of this type of interaction that have been widely discussed is that people have the opportunity to express themselves more easily than in traditional face-to-face settings. CMC gives individuals more control, and the anonymity to "design" their ideal self-presentation, at the same time avoiding the risk of certain social consequences, such as being judged, mocked, humiliated or criticized (Turkle, 1995; McKenna and Bargh, 2000; Caplan, 2003). Even more, the type of communication called hyper-personal interaction by Walther (1996), entails more editing capabilities, which not only encourages people to be more strategic and attentive to the creation and management of their own self-image, but also allows them to search more for clues to complete the presence of their conversation partners through the conversation. It has been suggested that it takes more effort to create informative and meaningful conversations than the face-to-face offline setting (Tidwell and Walther, 2002).

However, the invisibility of online communication also brings disadvantages. In some cases, the freedom and virtuality of the CMC increases the possibilities for people to exaggerate, deceive and pretend than in face-to-face communication in the offline environment (Cornwell and Lundgren, 2001; Donath, 1998; Suler, 2004; Drouin, et al., 2016). Especially, if we talk about invisibility in the sense of establishing a communicative relationship, some studies claim that without social, visual, non-verbal cues, CMC makes it harder to build affective bonds between people, and takes longer to have the kind of relationship that functioning as well as a face-to-face communication, which means that the online communicative environment is always more impersonal and abusive (Rice and Love, 1987; Moor et al., 2010; Derks, et al., 2008; Lea and Spears, 1992).

Further, to some extent, invisibility may be responsible for the misunderstanding and misinterpretation in online communication. After all, online communicative behaviours are not always exactly represented by literal claims. For words, people can be driven psychologically based on different social and culture contexts, such as Chinese style modesty, as we discussed earlier. More generally, it makes difference out of people's personality or the communicative situation they are in, for example, in a situation in which people want to hide or reveal particular emotions. In this case, when textual information is not available, or either its meaning is fully transferred, non-verbal clues can help with reducing the ambiguity of emotional expression in

presetting before people commit to a communicative action (Derks, et al., 2007). In a face-to-face communicative context, non-verbal clues usually help people to make an emotional judgement, and adjust their emotions to further situational information in later communicative interaction. However, in a CMC setting, such prejudgment can be inaccurate in the absence of necessary situational information and non-verbal cues. We either miss out on them completely, or use what we have, such as experience, imagination, knowledge, and intuition, to help ourselves make the judgement by completing the information picture (Shaw, 1981). That is the cause of misunderstanding and misinterpretation in written communication, which can lead to further bad communication down the line (McKenna and Bargh, 2000).

In addition, invisibility can interfere with the role that attitudes and emotions play in communication. According to Cramton et al. (2007), compared to the offline communicative setting, invisibility leads to dispositional attribution rather than situational attribution. That is, because they are invisible to each other, people rely excessively on attitudinal behaviour rather than any explanations that come out of situational information. Non-verbal cues are believed to intensify or soften emotional expression (Lee and Wagner, 2002), which can greatly influence the interpersonal process. For example, positive affections, especially in response, such as comfort, sympathy and praise, are more likely to be sensed in face-to-face communicative settings (Drolet and Morris, 2000), because verbal form usually is not the preferred way of expressing them. According to Christophe and Rime (1997), the less verbal information a listener gives, the more they will dramatize their response for the speaker; the more they manifest emotional expression through non-verbal behaviours, the better the result of the communication will be. However, in the online setting, such positive emotional expression can be greatly weakened, since online communication affects people in a way more inclined to impersonal conversations (Rice and Love, 1987). Since the invisibility of online communication gives people less social context cues for reacting, it becomes more depersonalized, and people will more focus on themselves rather than others (Kiesler et al., 1984). This can reduce willingness and responsibility on both sides of the communication. If the motives are not strong enough, the parties to communication hardly "elicit mimicry", which as Derks, et al. (2007) explained is the imitation people do when they want to fit in, or get along with somebody who they find it favorable to communicate with. Imitation, including gestures, facial expressions, posture and tone of voice, can greatly contribute to building affective bonding between people by expressing emotions well through non-verbal cues (Derks, et al., 2007).

On the other hand, in some cases, for example in discussions, deliberation and disagreements, when emotional/attitude expression cannot be properly expressed, but can only presented in text-based form, verbal information can cause what Spear, et al., (2002) called "strategic resistance effects". This describes the situation in which people tend to highlight their group standing and identity, or gain more support and recognition in a conflict by expressing critical attitudes and negative emotions to out-group members. In such situations, emotional expression can be more intense and even dramatic, and creates more opportunities for negative attribution to their opponents in communication (Keltner et al., 1993; Sasaki and Ohbuchi, 1999). Rather than terminating the communication, negative emotional expression leads to more negative interactive behaviours (referred to as flaming in most studies), such as offensive, hostile comments, insults, and name-calling. Such behaviours are usually responsible for escalating the expression of different opinions into outright conflict in the context of discussion (Derks, et al., 2007).

6.2.2 Minimization of status and authority

The online setting has greatly changed the construction of authority that is customary in offline society. In traditional face-to-face communication setting, one's status and power can have much more impact on the process of communicative interaction. It is reflected not only in language and words, but also other non-verbal elements such as clothing, bearing and the style of conversation. Because elements of this sort are missing, the construction of authority is very different in a text only communicative context. This is configured by Suler (2004) as "minimization of status and authority" in the online communicative setting. The online communicative environment, therefore, is known by everyone, especially members from lower status, to be one in which "peer relationships" - freely talking and thinking among people of different status – can figure, without fear of being disapproved of or dismissed (Postmes and Spears, 2002). In anything approaching equality in discourse participation, as Cohen (1997) argues, everyone's opinion should be equally treated, with respect and without being interrupted due to any differences of a social nature, namely communication should be egalitarian in essence. From that perspective, researchers have studied the effect of status change in online communications, trying to argue that CMC reduces the social inequality of offline settings, especially for those with less power offline, who can have equal discursive influence in online communications (Dubrovsky et al., 1991; Graham and Wright, 2014; Bordia, 1997).

However, some data actually supports the opposite claim: that the CMC setting contributes to no significant change in inequality in online discourse participation. For example, as Olmsted (2003) found, group communication via computers created the same amount of information in quantity and quality as in a face-to-face group even though the sensations experienced by the participating individuals were hugely different. People from the face-to-face talking group showed a high degree of satisfaction with the quantity and quality of the information which was not much influenced by the social presence of other participants. On the other hand, there were a significant amount of in-group conflict in the computer-based group. Cases of this kind lead us to try to understand the online communicative situation from a moral perspective, for example, by asking how online communicative behaviour can be morally influenced in different communicative settings.

To further understand it from a moral aspect, we have to think about moral orientation. There are two basic views of morality in psychology: one is the theory of orientation towards fairness represented by Piaget (1997) and Kohlberg (1969). In his early work, Piaget (1997) discovered that the critical stage at which children have moral judgement is their cognitive development of notions of justice and the influence of the fairness and rightness of punishment modeled by adults. Kohlberg (1969) improved that view with the concept of developmental stages of moral cognition. He insisted, however, on Piaget's view that the orientation of moral development is built around fairness, only weighting principles, values, obligations and social contracts differently at different stages. In such an orientation, moral judgement is inclined to be formulated on the basis of objectivity, logicality and reason. From the perspective of interpersonal relationships, a fairness-oriented morality puts more stress on the independence of individuals, the responsibilities and obligations of each person, and the equality and the reciprocity in relationship with each other. In the context of conflict, fairness-oriented morality responds more to principles and laws on faith in justice, tends to seek solutions through judgements and decisions based on weighting differences, and divergence between individuals and interest groups. This is different from the moral-concern-oriented theory (represented by Gillian (1982) and Noddings (2010), which embodies altruistic intent. Especially in the context of conflict, moral concern relies more on emotion, feelings and care to deal with moral difficulties, focusing on relationship-building –remaining in and developing - with others in society (see Blum, 1988).

Relatedly, moral thinking in the Chinese context is conducted on a different dimension, the differential mode of association (Fei,1992). As we discussed earlier, in the Chinese concept of Renqing, the value of the has to be recognized in the people's relationships with others in society. In the Chinese understanding, sense of self does not point to an autonomous individual. The achievement of self-worth only takes place in interaction, from benefiting others in society (Zhu and Zhuang, 2002; Fei, 1992). The Chinese self, in that sense, is seen as a knot, in which the value lies in connecting all one's social relationships into a web. For individuals, each individual-centered network can be seen as a unit, a relatively small social circle. People within the social circle are treated as insiders.

In traditional Chinese society, however, there are other factors that can make big difference in building such connections, such as superiority and inferiority, age and youth, wealth and poverty (Bian, 2012). As reflected in the differential mode of association, these "hierarchies" are well recognized in interpersonal relationships too, and considered significant for relationship establishment and maintenance. Unlike in the western concept, however, the traditional Chinese moral concept is designed intentionally to maintain and strengthen the original social hierarchic structure rather than to reform it. A series of moral and ethical principles, for example, The Three Cardinal Guides (ruler guides subject, father guides son and husband guides wife), The Five Constant Virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, knowledge and sincerity), The Three Obediences for a women (to obey her father as a daughter; her husband as a wife; and her sons in widowhood), and Four Virtues (wifely virtue, wifely speech, wifely manner and wifely work), are all set up to meet and maintain a sequence of hierarchical structures of difference in Chinese culture.

Therefore, from the point of view of interactional relationships, the Chinese moral concept has to be understood from the orientation of moral fairness and moral concern within the framework of this differential sequence. First, fairness-orientated morality is applied with consideration of the role people play in relationships with each other. Roles can be represented through differences on social status and social resources caused by the differential pattern of the structure of social hierarchy. This can be interpreted as being equal and reciprocal in difference. For example, morality demands that people should treat those who are on the same hierarchic level as themselves with equality and reciprocity. Meanwhile, they must fulfill their moral obligation, which is to respect and obey the facts, and the rule that people on different hierarchic levels should be treated differently. Such morality serves to keep the hierarchy stable

by educating people to show respect for the hierarchy and to be obedient to the rules of privilege.

Likewise, concern-oriented morality, in the Chinese context, is applied in a hierarchical mode too. Care, concern, patience and love cannot be bestowed on everyone in hierarchical society. In Confucian views, love (affection) should be given with distinctions, but not universally. We can see that in many social situations, the Chinese set boundaries between the in-group and the out-group. This can be based on blood ties, gratitude for the love and care given one from childhood, or depend on the closeness of the relationship to make a moral judgement. The standard of concern-orientated morality is set by the duties and obligations of everyone to play their role in the moral order of Chinese society. For example, four of the five cardinal relationships in feudal China (the monarch-subject relationship, father-son relationship, husband-wife relationship and brotherhood), all demonstrate inequality in the duties and obligations of each role. If good friends become sworn brothers or sisters, the equal status applied between friends will change. The moral courtesies of brotherhood are applied to deal with the differences between older and younger. To be specific, as a big brother, one is given more dignity, power, influence and authority (mostly not gained) as such status-establishes. Correspondingly, in the little brother role, one should fulfill the obligation of being respectful, compliant and indoctrinated by the older one.

In modern Chinese society, however, the construction of authority in discourse is not based on the same principles used to define authority in traditional Chinese society, which is largely determined by the role the individual plays in hierarchical relationships, social relationships and cultural and ethical relationships. Rather, it is determined by one’s economic status and resources and the social relationship. At the same time, the important of superior authority is still as powerful for Chinese people in exerting more influence and controlling more resources. Once people have higher socio-economic positions and more social connections, the more power they will have in decision-making, not only because of the greater chance they have to control and make use of resources, but also for the greater influence, respect, and authority they will earn from others (Feng, 2007). The result is that this has caused alienation from the principle of Chinese people building relationships in communication, which induces people in communicative interaction to be more interest-oriented, especially economic interest. The interest-oriented principle of relationship-building has become a default social rule, especially in the context of conflict or competition. In traditional communicative society, moral behaviour

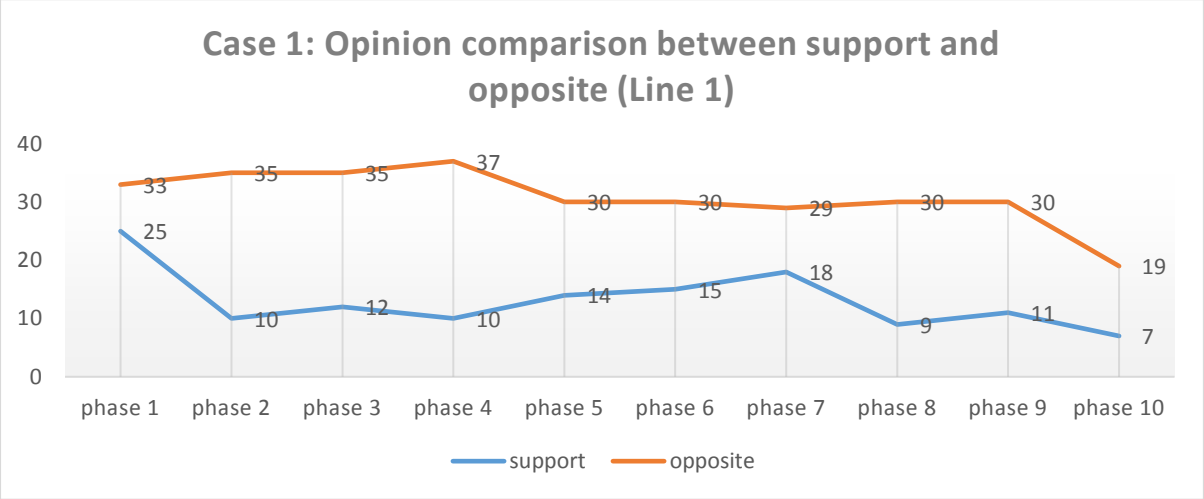
is present in individual characters in relationships with others. It is common for people to believe that with greater power and authority there is always greater responsibility, seen as obligations due. By fulfilling more obligations, one can earn higher moral status. With the shift in focus, however, moral judgement, becomes attached to gains and losses, by people considering whether or not they can make a profit from developing a relationship with someone who has high social status, a good family background, and wide connections in a long-term sense (Yan et al., 2013). The online communicative setting has, no doubt, added fuel to the fire, by providing many "favourable" conditions for role-playing in a world made up of only language and text. Such inappropriate role play, in the Chinese context, has been studied as "the inflation of public discourse authority", which is considered responsible for problematic moral expression in an online communicative environment (Shi and Jiang, 2016).

Chapter VII. The Findings to Understand Online Deliberation on the Moral Level

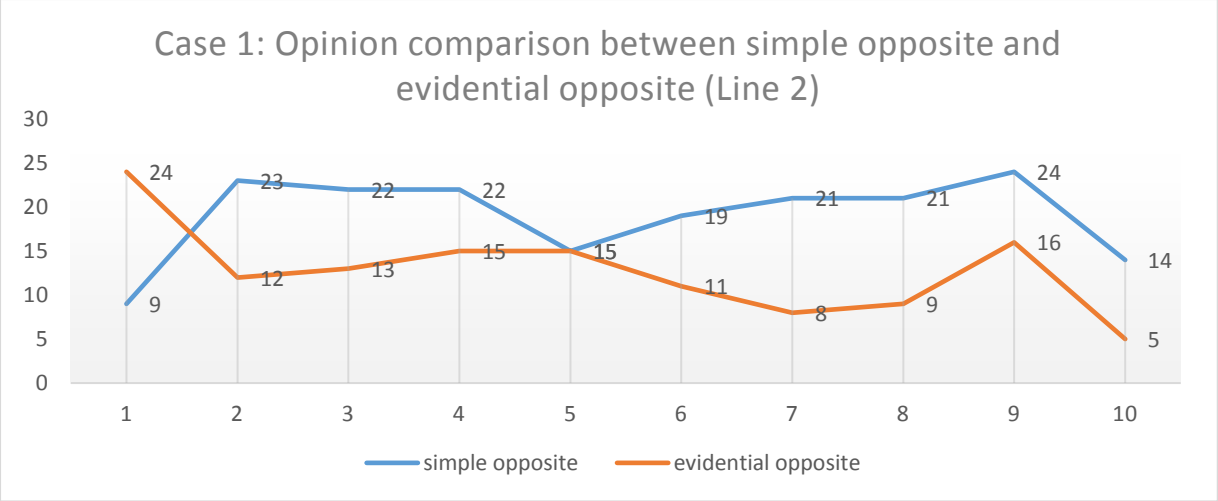
7.1 The Online material analysis: Evidence of online morality in two dimensions

7.1.1 Case I

In case 1, we can firstly see in Line 1 that the opinion gap is the most obvious in the first beginning from phase 1 to phase 2. Then from phase 1 to phase 8, we can see the reverse interaction between two lines constantly in varying degrees. Since phase 8, with the popularity of this topic fading, the amount of supporting message and opposing message tend to be stable and present a downward trend. As the opposing opinion line is above the support line along the whole deliberation process, the mainstream opinion in this case is the opposing opinions. Since simple opposing opinion group is influenced by evidential opinions from the same opinion camp (mainstream opinions as well) and also support opinions from the other opinion camp in deliberation. I then further compare those two interactive relationships.



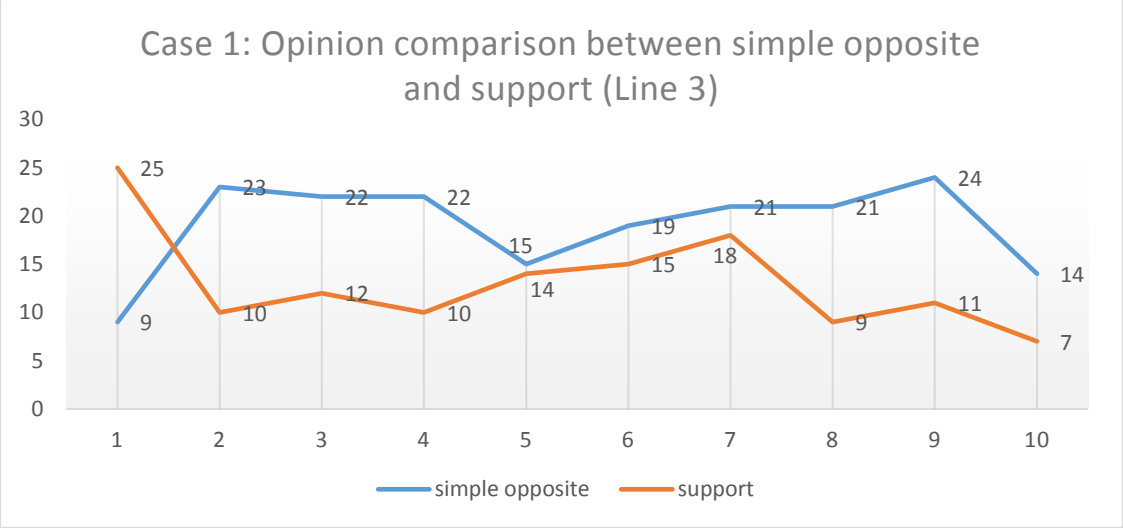
Firstly, I calculate the variation difference value in each unit between simple opposing line and evidential opposing line in line 2. After having all the values in table 1, I sum them up to determine the final interactivity value of this relationship as 54.



Case 1: The variation difference value between simple opposite line and evidential opposite line (Table 1)

P1-2	(23-9)-(12-24)=26
P2-3	(13-12)-(22-23)=2
P3-4	(15-13)-(22-22)=2
P4-5	(15-15)-(15-22)=7
P5-6	(19-15)-(11-15)=8
P6-7	(21-19)-(8-11)=5
P7-8	(9-8)-(21-21)=1
P8-9	(16-9)-(24-21)=4
P9-10	(16-5)-(24-14)=1

Next, I calculate the variation difference value of each unit between these two different opinion camps, simple opposing line and supporting line (see line 3). After having all values in table 2, I sum up all the values to have the final interactivity value of this relationship as 37.



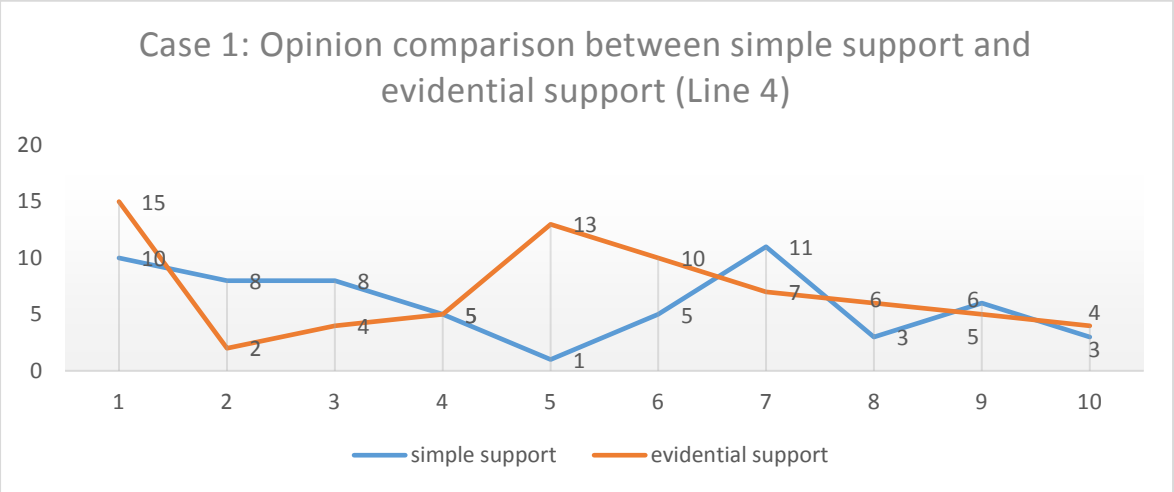
Case 1: The variation difference value between simple opposite line and support line (Table 2)

P1-2	|(23-9)+(10-25)|=1
P2-3	|(22-23)+(12-10)|=1
P3-4	|(22-22)+(10-12)|=2
P4-5	|(15-22)+(14-10)|=3
P5-6	|(19-15)+(15-14)|=5
P6-7	|(21-19)+(18-15)|=5
P7-8	|(21-21)+(9-18)|=9
P8-9	|(24-21)+(11-9)|=5
P9-10	|(24-14)+(7-11)|=6

Since the interactivity value of the relationship between simple opposing opinions and the supporting opinions is fewer, it means the interactivity is stronger between simple opposing opinions and supporting opinions. In other word, as the mainstream opinion group, simple opposing opinion group could interact more with the different minority opinions (the supporting opinions) rather than the mainstream same opinions (the evidential opposing opinions). Therefore, it shows us that, speaking of the simple opposing opinion group, moral intuition in this case may have played a role to some extent.

I then continue to detest if there is any clue of moral intuition working on the deliberation between the majority opinion group and the minority opinion group. By thinking simple supporting opinion group which is influenced by the opposing opinions from the mainstream/majority opinion camp and the evidential supporting opinions from the same

minority opinion camp, I draw two lines to compare those two interactive relationships (see Line 4).



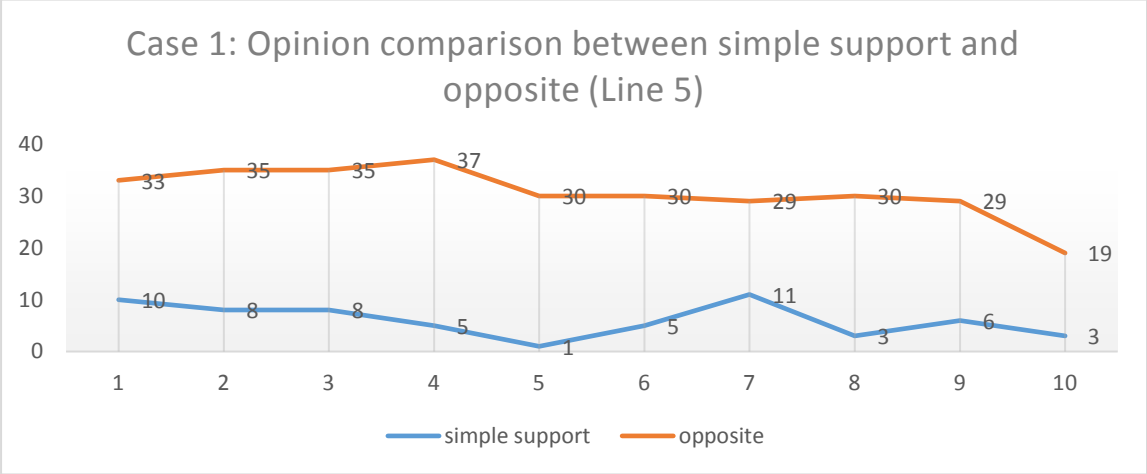
I calculate the variation difference value for each unit in Line 4. The results are shown in table 3. Therefore, the sum of those values 58 represents the extent of the interactivity between these two opinion groups.

Case 1: The variation difference value between simple support line and evidential support line (Table 3)

P1-2	|(8-10)-(2-15)|=11
P2-3	|(8-8)-(4-2)|=2
P3-4	|(5-8)-(5-4)|=4
P4-5	|(13-5)-(1-5)|=12
P5-6	|(10-13)-(5-1)|=7
P6-7	|(7-10)-(11-5)|=9
P7-8	|(6-7)-(3-11)|=7
P8-9	|(5-6)-(6-3)|=4
P9-10	|(3-6)-(4-5)|=2

I continue to calculate the variation difference value between simple supporting line and opposing line in each unit showing in Line 5. The sum of all the values listed in table 4, which is the extent value of the interactivity between those two opinion groups, is 43.

By comparing the two result, it shows that simple supporting opinion group has more intense interactivity with opposing opinion group. It is saying that, as the minority opinion group, the simple supporting opinion group interacted more with the mainstream/majority opinion group more than the non-mainstream/minority opinion group. It is saying, the influence of moral intuition for the deliberative interaction between the majority group and the minority group in this case is not very significant.



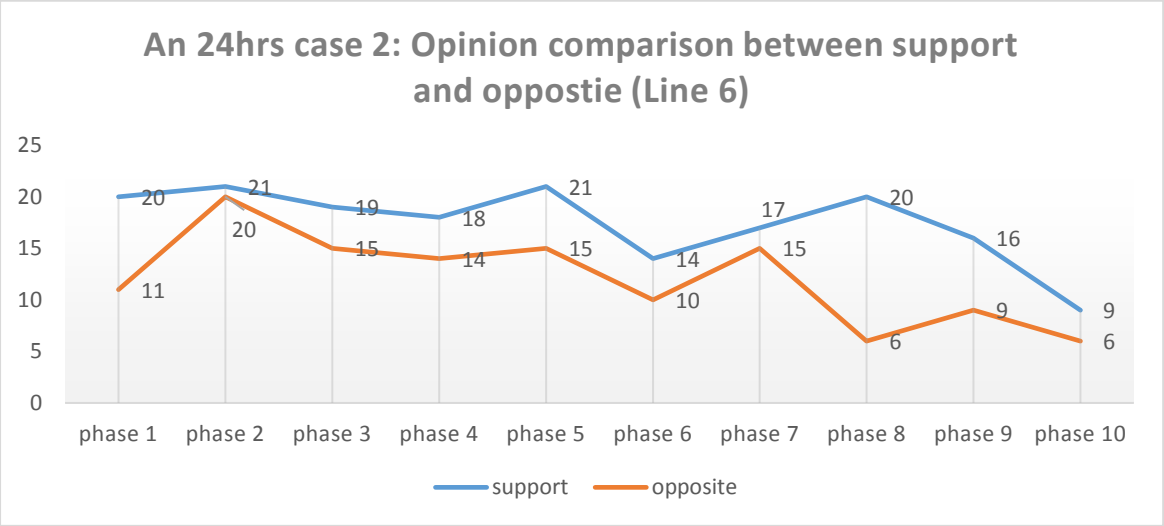
Case 1: The variation difference value between simple support line and opposite line (Table 4)

P1-2	|(35-33)+(8-10)|=0
P2-3	|(35-35)+(8-8)|=0
P3-4	|(37-35)+(5-8)|=1
P4-5	|(30-37)+(1-5)|=11
P5-6	|(30-30)+(5-1)|=4
P6-7	|(29-30)+(11-5)|=5
P7-8	|(30-29)+(3-11)|=7
P8-9	|(29-30)+(6-3)|=2
P9-10	|(19-29)+(3-6)|=13

7.1.2 Case study II

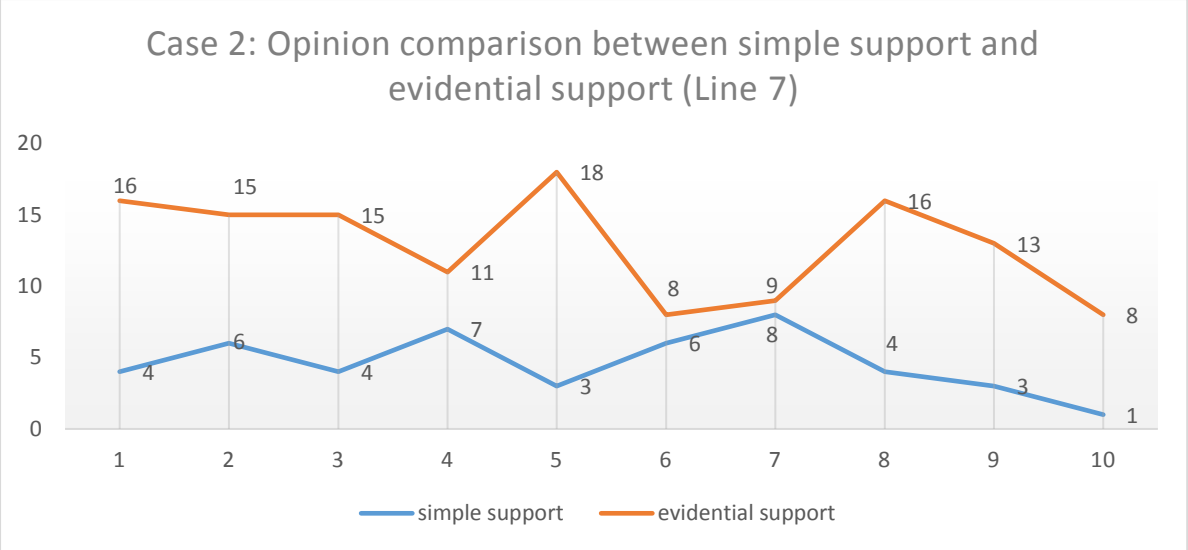
In this case, there is a very clear trend showing in Line 6 that how the number of supporting and opposing messages changed with the time. In the beginning of the deliberation from phase 1 to phase 2, there is a very obvious synclastic trend between these two opinion lines, meaning the deliberative interaction could be significant in the beginning. However, from phase 2 to phase 7, it shows that the change of these two lines is pretty much the same. It could mean that the degree of interactivity is small during the period. From phase7 to phase 9, it has a very

dramatic reverse move between these two lines. After that, with the popularity of this topic fading away, both lines are presenting a decreasing tendency.



In case II, the supporting opinion line is above the opposing one along the whole deliberation process. As a result, to detect the moral intuition between different opinion groups, the simple supporting opinion is the target opinion group. This group is influenced by the evidential supporting opinions from the same opinion camp and opposing opinions from the different opinion camp. I then make a comparison between these two relationships.

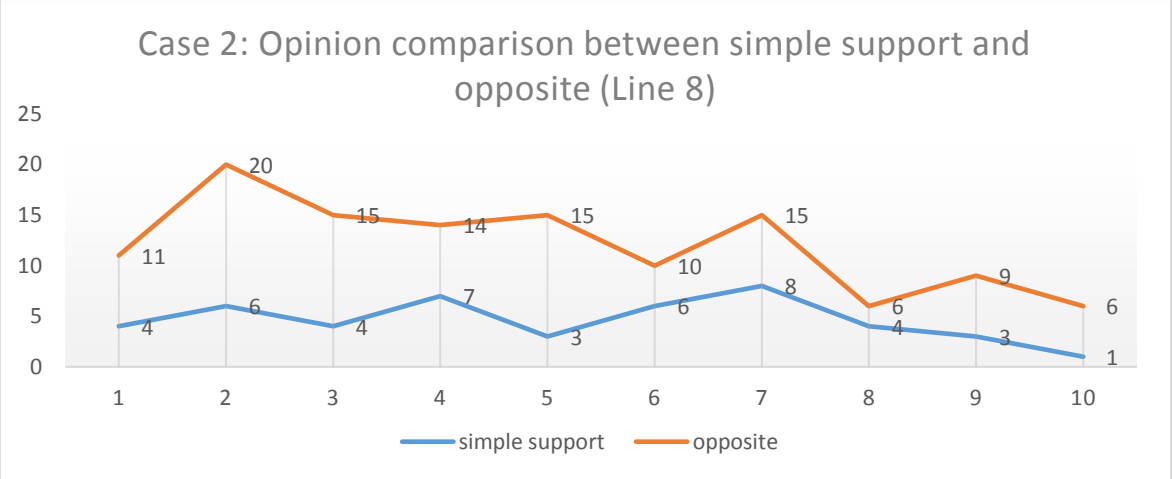
In Line 7, I calculate the variation difference values for each unit. With all the values showing in table 5, I get the sum for representing the interactivity between these two opinion groups, which is 49.



Case 2: The variation difference value between simple support line and evidential support line (Table 5)

P1-2	|(15-16)-(6-4)|=1
P2-3	|(15-15)-(4-6)|=2
P3-4	|(11-15)-(7-4)|=7
P4-5	|(18-11)-(3-7)|=11
P5-6	|(8-18)-(6-3)|=13
P6-7	|(9-8)-(8-6)|=1
P7-8	|(16-9)-(4-8)|=9
P8-9	|(13-16)-(3-4)|=2
P9-10	|(8-13)-(1-3)|=3

For the next, I calculate the variation difference value in each unit in Line 8 between the simple supporting line and the opposing line. To sum of all the values in table 6, I measure the interactivity between these two opinion groups as 52.



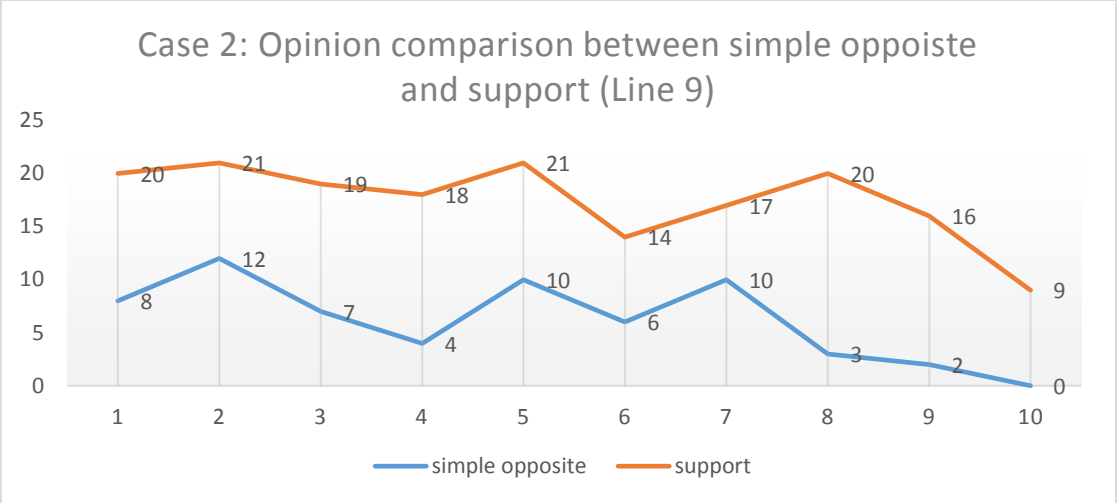
Case 2: The variation difference value between simple support line and opposite line (Table 6)

P1-2	|(20-11)+(6-4)|=11
P2-3	|(15-20)+(4-6)|=7
P3-4	|(14-15)+(7-4)|=2
P4-5	|(15-14)+(3-7)|=3
P5-6	|(10-15)+(6-3)|=2
P6-7	|(15-10)+(8-6)|=7
P7-8	|(6-15)+(4-8)|=13
P8-9	|(9-6)+(3-4)|=2
P9-10	|(6-9)+(1-3)|=5

Therefore, the result shows that the interactivity between the simple supporting opinion group with the evidential supporting opinion group is more intense in this case. In other word, as the mainstream opinion group, simple supporting opinion group interacted more with the evidential supporting opinions which is from the same mainstream opinion camp, rather than the opposing opinions from the different opinion camp in this deliberation. Therefore, speaking of the simple supporting opinion group, it could point to the result that the influence of moral intuition in this case is not very significant.

On the other hand, as the minority opinion group, the simple opposing opinion group also interacted with two kinds of opinions in the deliberation. One is the supporting opinions as the mainstream opinion in this case; the other is the evidential opposing opinions from the minority opinion camp. I then further to compare the interactivity of these two relationships.

In Line 9, I calculate all the variation difference values in each unit, then sum up the values listed in table 7 to measure the interactivity of the relationship between the simple opposing opinion group and the supporting opinion group. The result is 61.



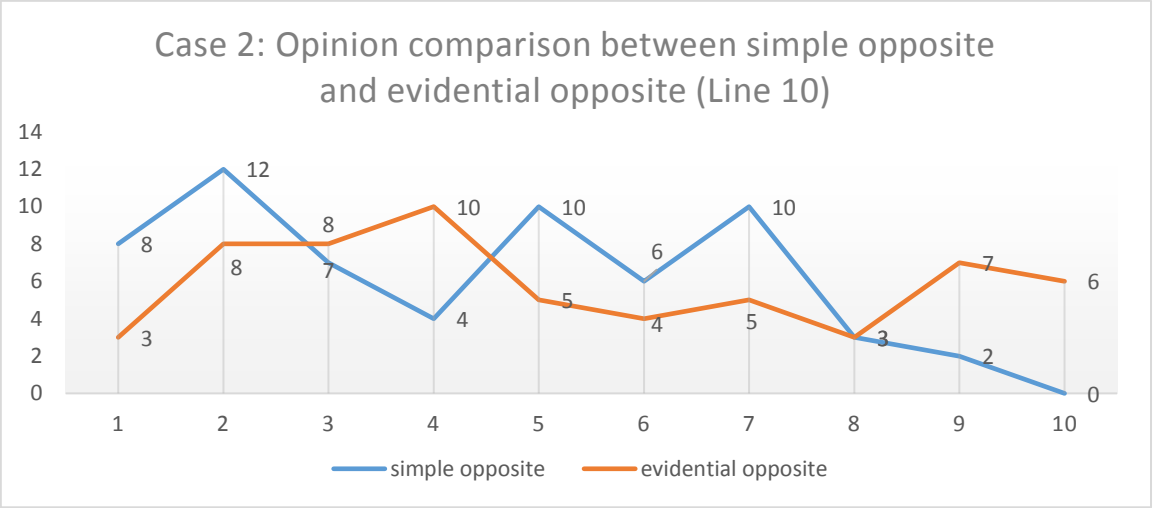
Case 2: The variation difference value between simple opposite line and support line (Table 7)

P1-2	|(21-20)+(12-8)|=5
P2-3	|(19-21)+(7-12)|=7
P3-4	|(18-19)+(4-7)|=4
P4-5	|(21-18)+(10-4)|=9
P5-6	|(14-21)+(6-10)|=11
P6-7	|(17-14)+(10-6)|=7
P7-8	|(20-17)+(3-10)|=4
P8-9	|(16-20)+(2-3)|=5
P9-10	|(9-16)+(0-2)|=9

I then calculate the variation difference values in Line 10 between the simple opposing line and the evidential opposing line, having the sum of all results showing in table 8, which is 39.

Comparing these two sum values, the value represented the relationship in Line 9 is much fewer than in Line 10, which means the interactivity between the simple opposing opinion group and the evidential opposing opinion group is more intense. In that case, the simple opposing opinion group could have interacted to a larger extent with the minority opinion group (evidential opposing opinion group), rather than the majority support opinion group in this case, which

tells, in some degree, the moral intuition may have some influence in the deliberation between the majority opinion group and the minority opinion group.

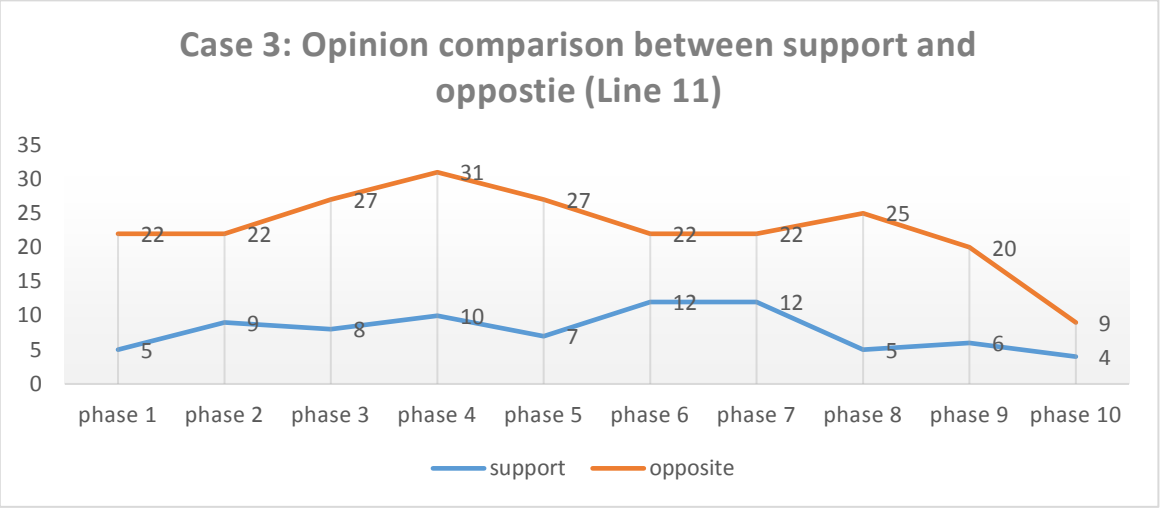


Case 2: The variation difference value between simple opposite line and evidential opposite line (Table 8)

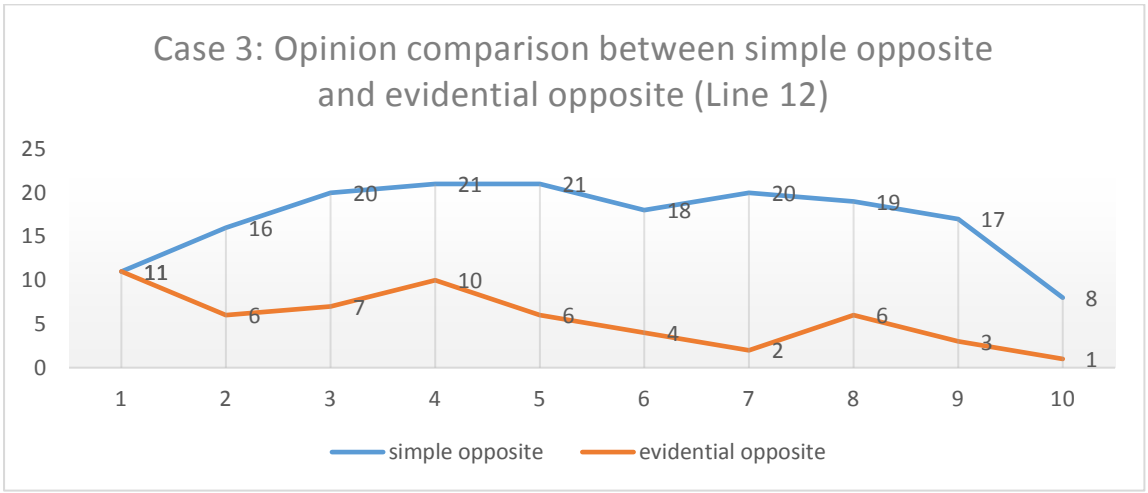
P1-2	|(12-8)-(8-3)|=1
P2-3	|(8-8)-(7-12)|=5
P3-4	|(10-8)-(4-7)|=5
P4-5	|(10-4)-(5-10)|=11
P5-6	|(6-10)-(4-5)|=3
P6-7	|(10-6)-(5-4)|=3
P7-8	|(3-10)-(3-5)|=5
P8-9	|(7-3)-(2-3)|=5
P9-10	|(6-7)-(0-2)|=1

7.1.3 Case Study III

In case III, it shows significant interactive move in the beginning of the deliberation too in Line 11. There is another two more obvious interaction during phase 5 to phase 6, and phase 7 to phase 9. Moreover, during phase 9 to phase 10, even though both lines are decreasing, there is a major difference in degrees, meaning deliberative interaction could still be strong at the end. Besides, opposing opinions has the advantage in numbers all along the process, which makes it the mainstream opinion in this case. I then target simple opposite opinion group, making a comparison between the interactivity it has with the evidential opposing opinion group from the same opinion camp, and the supporting opinion group from the different opinion camp, for detecting the moral intuition phenomenon between different opinion groups.



Firstly, I focus on the interactivity between the simple opposing opinion group and the evidential opposing opinion group. In Line 12, I calculate the variation difference values in each unit. Using the values listed in table 9, I measure the interactivity between those two groups as 37.

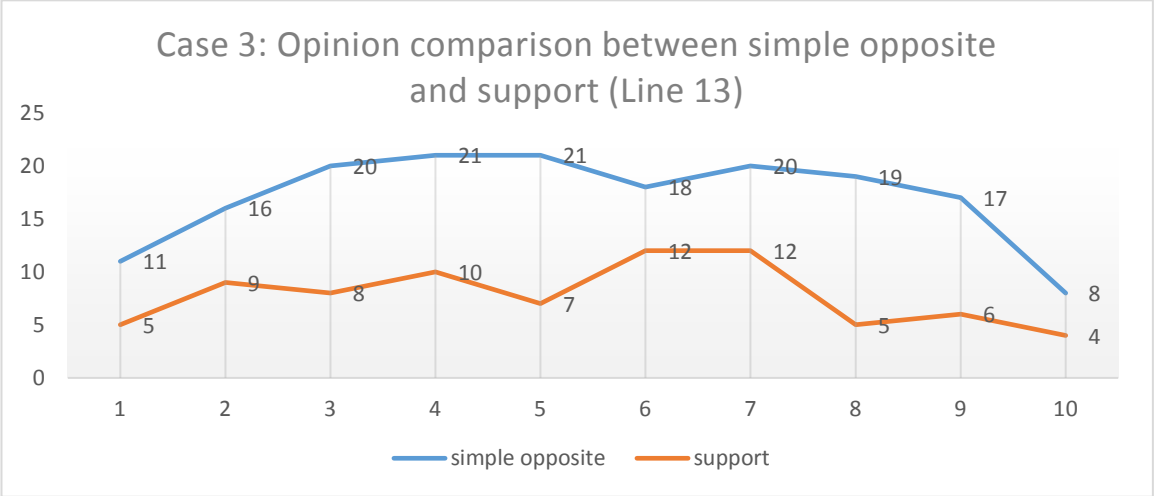


Case 3: The variation difference value between simple opposite line and evidential opposite line (Table 9)

P1-2	|(16-11)-(6-11)|=10
P2-3	|(20-16)-(7-6)|=3
P3-4	|(21-20)-(10-7)|=2
P4-5	|(21-21)-(6-10)|=4

P5-6	|(18-21)-(4-6)|=1
P6-7	|(20-18)-(2-4)|=4
P7-8	|(19-20)-(6-2)|=5
P8-9	|(17-19)-(3-6)|=1
P9-10	|(8-17)-(1-3)|=7

I continue to calculate the variation difference value in Line 13 for measuring the interactivity between the simple opposing opinion group and the supporting opinion group. To sum up all the values listed in table 10, we measure interactivity is 42.

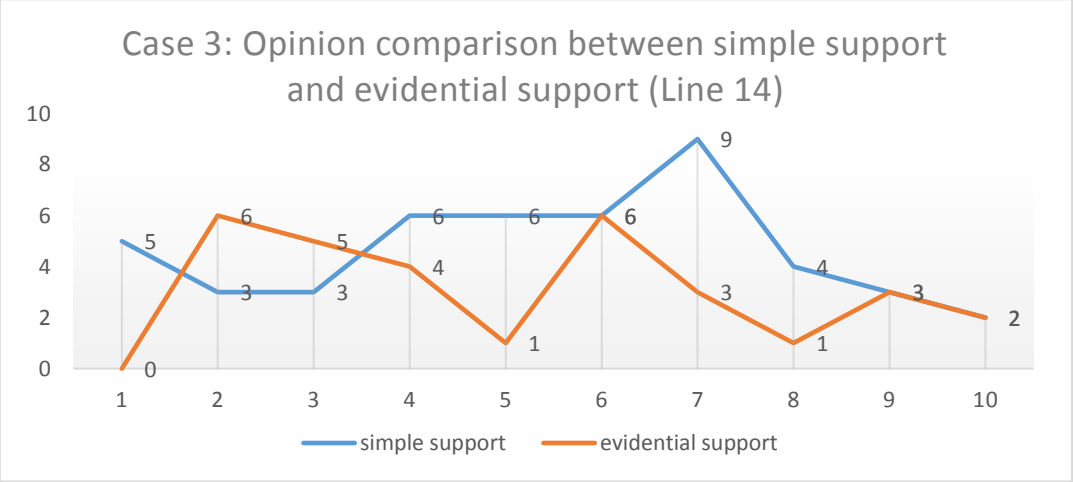


Case 3: The variation difference value between simple opposite line and support line (Table 10)

P1-2	|(16-11)+(9-5)|=9
P2-3	|(20-16)+(8-9)|=3
P3-4	|(21-20)+(10-8)|=3
P4-5	|(21-21)+(7-10)|=3
P5-6	|(18-21)+(12-7)|=2
P6-7	|(20-18)+(12-12)|=2
P7-8	|(19-20)+(5-12)|=8
P8-9	|(17-19)+(6-5)|=1
P9-10	|(8-17)+(4-6)|=11

Comparing with Line 12, the sum value of the interactivity presented in Line 13 is more, which means as the mainstream opinion group, the simple opposing opinion group interacted more with the evidential opposing opinion group which is the opinions from the same mainstream opinion camp, rather than the supporting opinion group which is the opinions from the different opinion camp. As a result, the function of moral intuition, speaking ideally, could be minor between different opinions in this case.

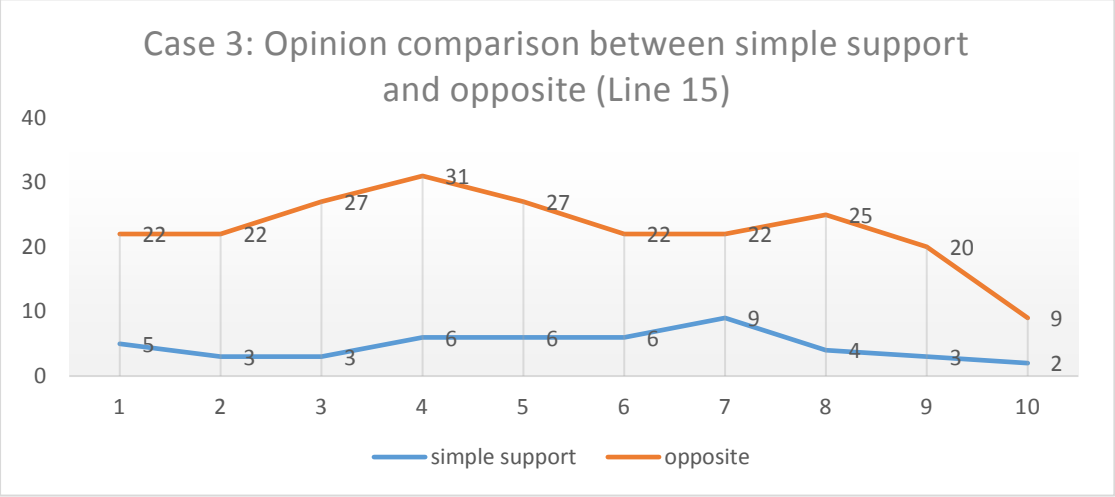
Setting the simple supporting opinion group as the target, I detect the moral intuition phenomenon between the majority opinion group and the minority one. In case III, they interacted with both the opposing opinion group as the mainstream opinion and the evidential supporting opinion group from the minority opinion camp. Firstly, I measure THE interactivity between the simple supporting opinion group and the evidential supporting opinion group. The variation difference values of each unit in Line 14 have been listed in table 11. The sum value for the interactivity of this relationship is 33.



Case 3: The variation difference value between simple support line and evidential support line (Table 11)

P1-2	|(6-0)-(3-5)|=8
P2-3	|(5-6)-(3-3)|=1
P3-4	|(6-3)-(4-5)|=4
P4-5	|(6-6)-(1-4)|=3
P5-6	|(6-6)-(6-1)|=5
P6-7	|(9-6)-(3-6)|=6
P7-8	|(4-9)-(1-3)|=3
P8-9	|(3-4)-(3-1)|=3
P9-10	|(2-3)-(2-3)|=0

The variation difference values calculated from Line 15 are listed in table 12. Then I have the sum values as 46 for the interactivity.



Case 3: The variation difference value between simple support line and opposite line (Table 12)

P1-2	|(22-22)+(3-5)|=2
P2-3	|(27-22)+(3-3)|=5
P3-4	|(31-27)+(6-3)|=7
P4-5	|(27-31)+(6-6)|=4
P5-6	|(22-27)+(6-6)|=5
P6-7	|(22-22)+(9-6)|=3
P7-8	|(25-22)+(4-9)|=2
P8-9	|(20-25)+(3-4)|=6
P9-10	|(9-20)+(2-3)|=12

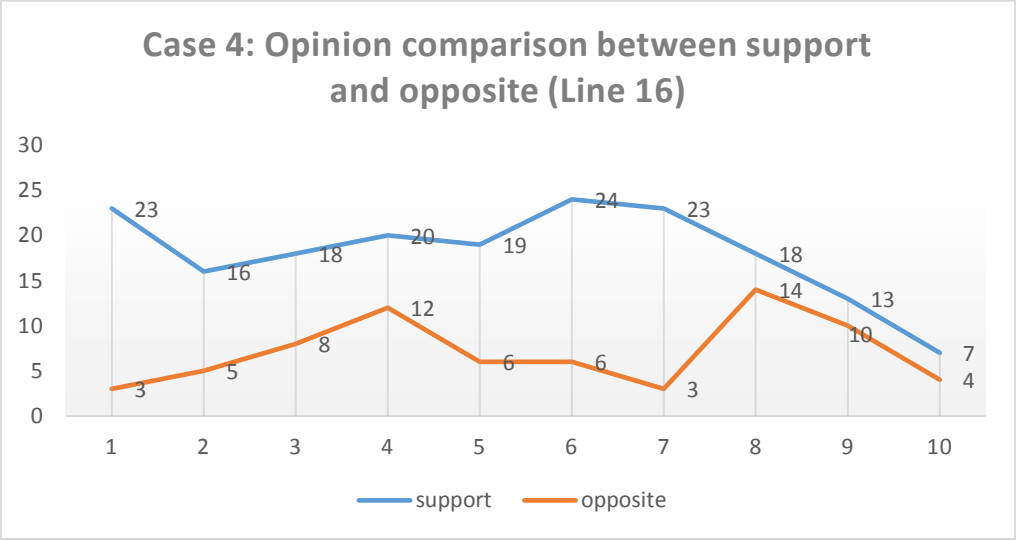
Comparing with the sum value from Line 14, this larger result means the interactivity between the simple supporting opinion group and the opposing opinion group in this case could be more intense. In other word, the simple opinion group could interact more with the evidential supporting opinion group from the minority camp, rather than the opposing opinion group from the majority opinion camp. In that case, it shows that the moral intuition could play a role for simple supporting opinion group in deliberation between the majority opinion group and the minority one.

7.1.4 Case Study IV

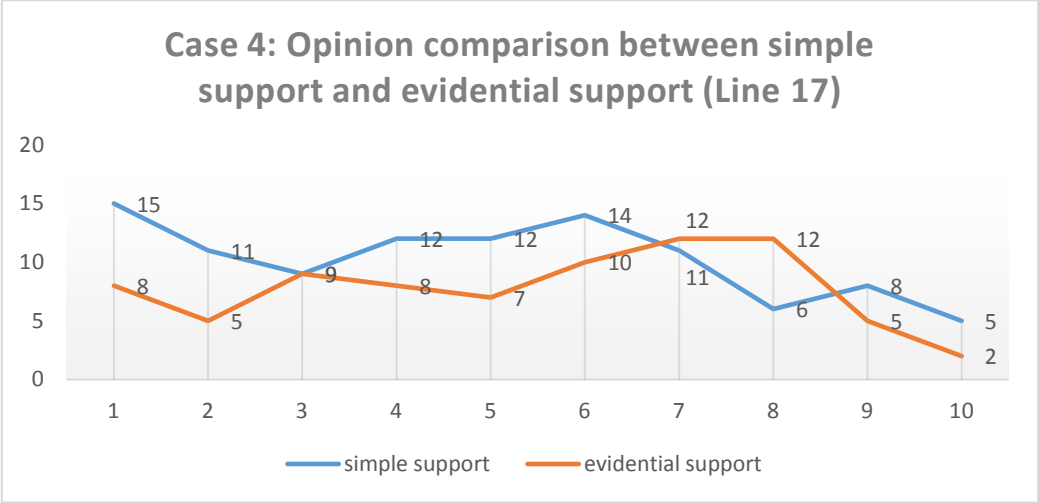
As Line 16 shows, Case IV has an obvious interaction in the beginning of this deliberation from phase 1 to phase 2. It then enters into a stable period from phase 2 to phase 4. Another interactive period is during phase 4 to phase 8. After phase 8, the heat of this topic cooled down, which brought downtrend for both opinion lines.

In the whole process, the supporting opinion line was always above the opposing opinion line, making it the mainstream opinion in this case. I then decided the simple supporting opinion group as the target opinion group in this case. They can interact with the evidential supporting opinion group from the same opinion camp as the mainstream opinion, and also the opposing opinion group from the different opinion camp. I then compare the interactivity that the simple opposing opinion group has with those two

.



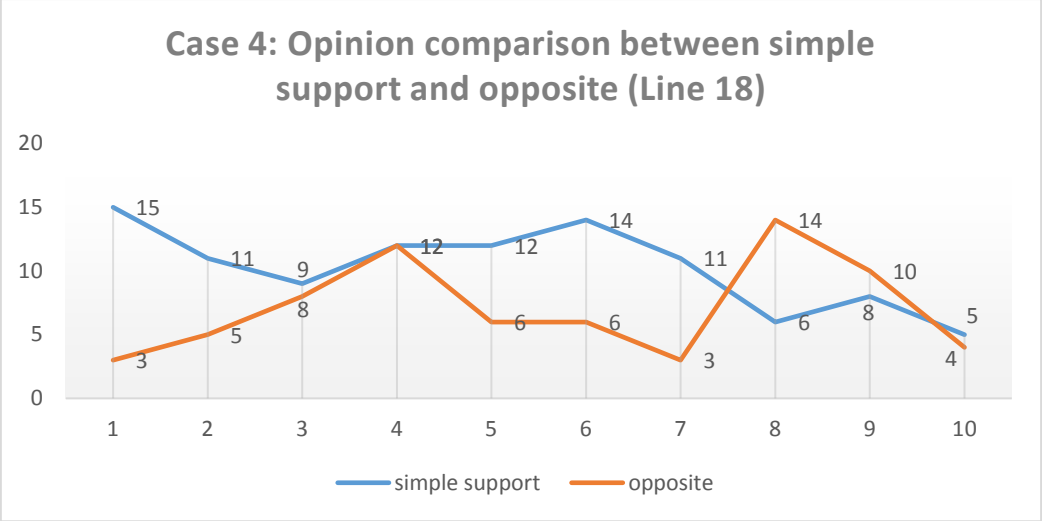
I first calculate the variation difference values in Line 17 for the interactivity between the simple supporting opinion group and the evidential supporting opinion group. By summing up all the values in table 13, I have the sum values for representing the interactivity as 30.



Case 4: The variation difference value between evidential support line and simple support line (Table 13)

P1-2	|(11-15)-(5-8)|=1
P2-3	|(9-11)-(9-5)|=6
P3-4	|(12-9)-(8-9)|=2
P4-5	|(12-12)-(7-8)|=1
P5-6	|(14-12)-(10-7)|=1
P6-7	|(11-14)-(12-10)|=5
P7-8	|(12-12)-(6-11)|=5
P8-9	|(5-12)-(8-6)|=9
P9-10	|(5-8)-(2-5)|=0

The next, I calculate the variation difference values in Line 18 for the interactivity between the simple supporting opinion group and the opposing opinion group. The result of summing up all values showing in table14 is 41.



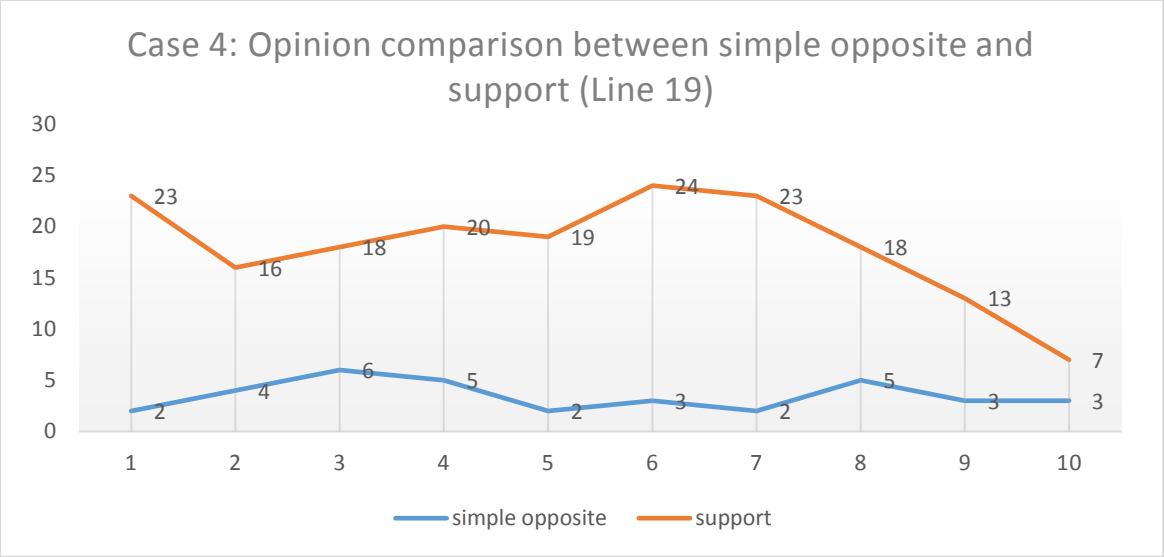
Case 4: The variation difference value between simple support line and opposite line (Table 14)

P1-2	|(11-15)+(5-3)|=2
P2-3	|(9-11)+(8-5)|=1
P3-4	|(12-9)+(12-8)|=7
P4-5	|(12-12)+(6-12)|=6
P5-6	|(14-12)+(6-6)|=2
P6-7	|(11-14)+(3-6)|=6
P7-8	|(14-3)+(6-11)|=6
P8-9	|(10-14)+(8-6)|=2
P9-10	|(4-10)+(5-8)|=9

To compare those results, the sum value from Line 18 is larger, which shows that the interactivity between the simple supporting opinion group and the evidential supporting opinion group is more intense. It is to say, as the mainstream opinion group in this case, the simple supporting opinion group could interact more with the evidential supporting opinion group from the same opinion camp than the opposing opinion one from the different opinion camp. The moral intuition, to that point, could play a role for simple supporting opinion group in deliberation with different opinions groups.

Taking the simple opposing opinion group from the minority opinion camp as the object, they can be influenced by the support opinion group as the majority opinion, and also the evidential opposing opinion group from the minority opinion camp. In that case, I compare the interactivity in those two relationships to see if there is a clue for moral intuition in deliberation considered between the majority opinion and the minority one.

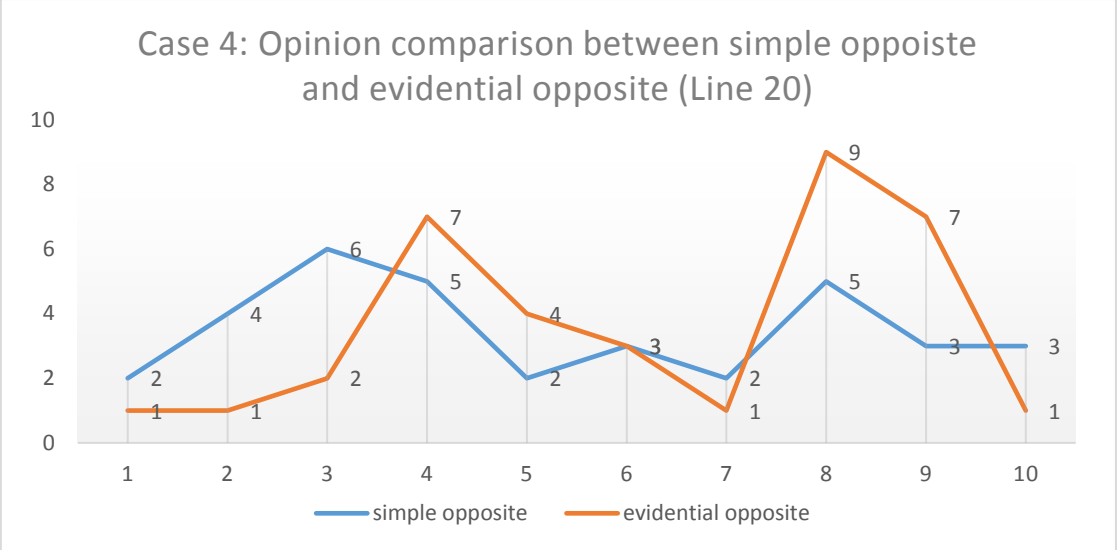
In Line 19, I firstly calculate the variation difference values of the interaction between simple opposing opinion group and the supporting opinion group for each unit. As you can see the values in table 15, I have them summed up for measuring the interactivity as 35.



Case 4: The variation difference value between simple opposite line and support line (Table 15)

P1-2	|(16-23)+(4-2)|=5
P2-3	|(18-16)+(6-4)|=4
P3-4	|(20-18)+(5-6)|=1
P4-5	|(19-20)+(2-5)|=4
P5-6	|(24-19)+(3-2)|=4
P6-7	|(23-24)+(2-3)|=2
P7-8	|(18-23)+(5-2)|=2
P8-9	|(13-18)+(3-5)|=7
P9-10	|(7-13)+(3-3)|=6

In the following Line 20, I have all the variation difference values calculated for the interactivity between the simple opposing opinion group and the evidential opposing opinion group in table 16. The sum value is 23.



Case 4: The variation difference value between simple opposite line and evidential opposite line (Table 17)

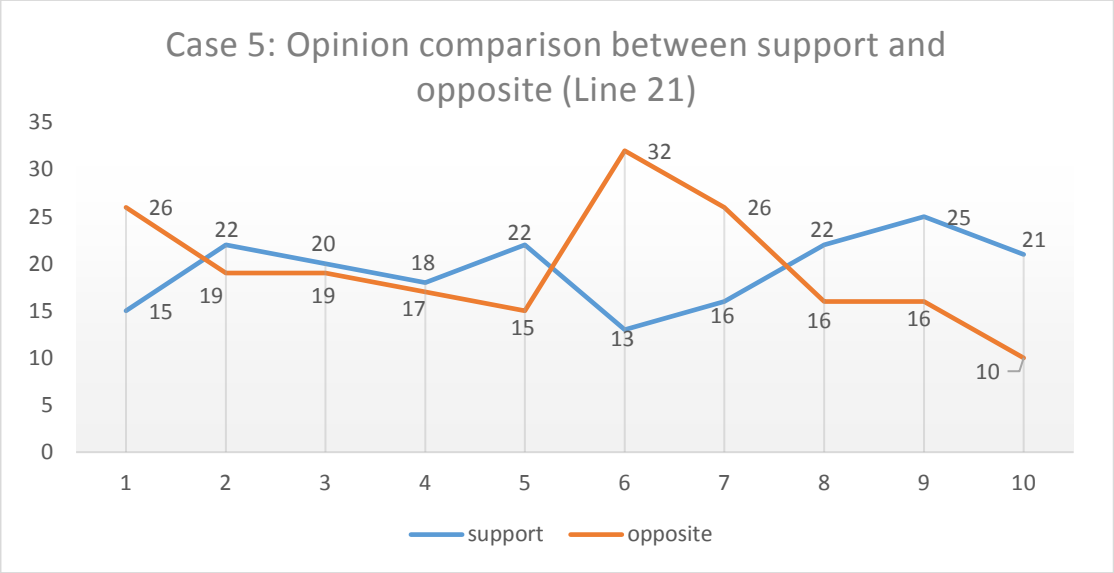
P1-2	|(4-2)-(1-1)|=2
P2-3	|(6-4)-(2-1)|=1
P3-4	|(5-6)-(7-2)|=6
P4-5	|(4-7)-(2-5)|=0
P5-6	|(3-4)-(3-2)|=2
P6-7	|(2-3)-(1-3)|=1
P7-8	|(5-2)-(9-1)|=5
P8-9	|(7-9)-(3-5)|=0
P9-10	|(1-7)-(3-3)|=6

Comparing the results, the sum value from Line 20 is much fewer, meaning the interactivity between the simple opposing opinion group and the evidential opposing opinion group is more intense. In other word, as the minority opinion group in this case, the simple opposing opinion group could interact with the minority opinion camp (also the evidential opposing opinion group) more than the majority opinion camp (also the supporting opinion group). In that case, there is a chance for us to believe moral intuition plays a role in deliberation between the majority camp and the minority one for the simple opposing opinion group.

7.1.5 Case Study V

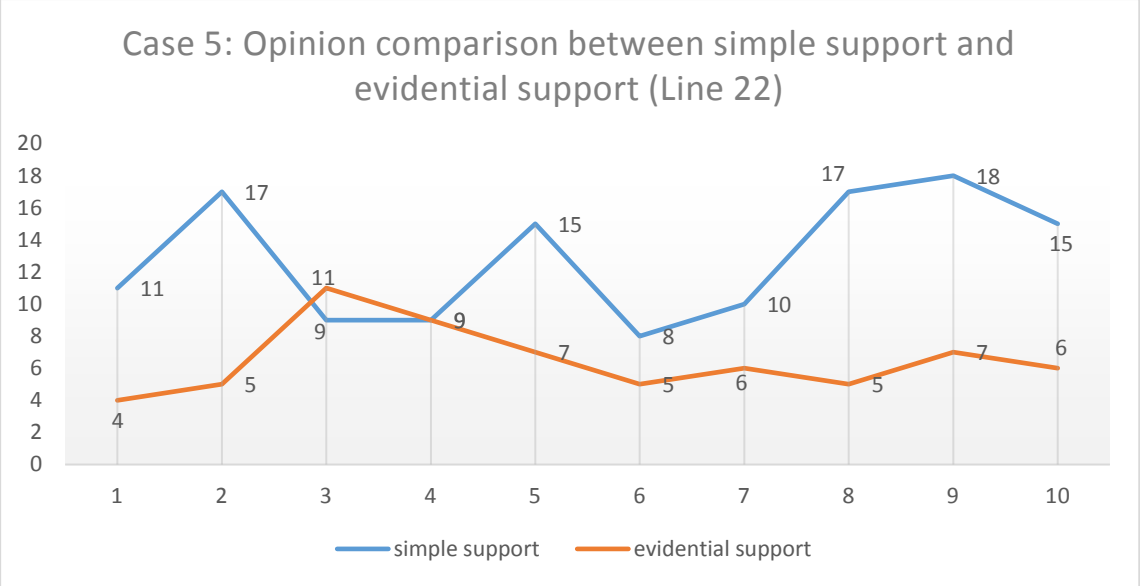
As what we see from Line 21, there is an obvious interactive move between the supporting opinion line and the opposing opinion line from phase 1 to phase 2. Another obvious interaction starts from phase 4, which means the interactive effect could be strong during this period until

phase 8. In phase 8—phase 9, we can see a gap between these two lines. The opposing opinion line remains the same while the supporting opinion line is increasing slight, which could mean that there is still interaction to some extent at the end.



In this case, we can see supporting opinion line has the advantage in numbers for most of time. Especially, support opinions got back to the dominant position since phase 7, and maintained the position until the very end, which makes them as the mainstream opinion in this case. So, I make the simple supporting opinion group as the target, studying the interactivity it has with the evidential supporting opinion group from the same opinion camp, and also the opposing opinion group from the different opinion camp.

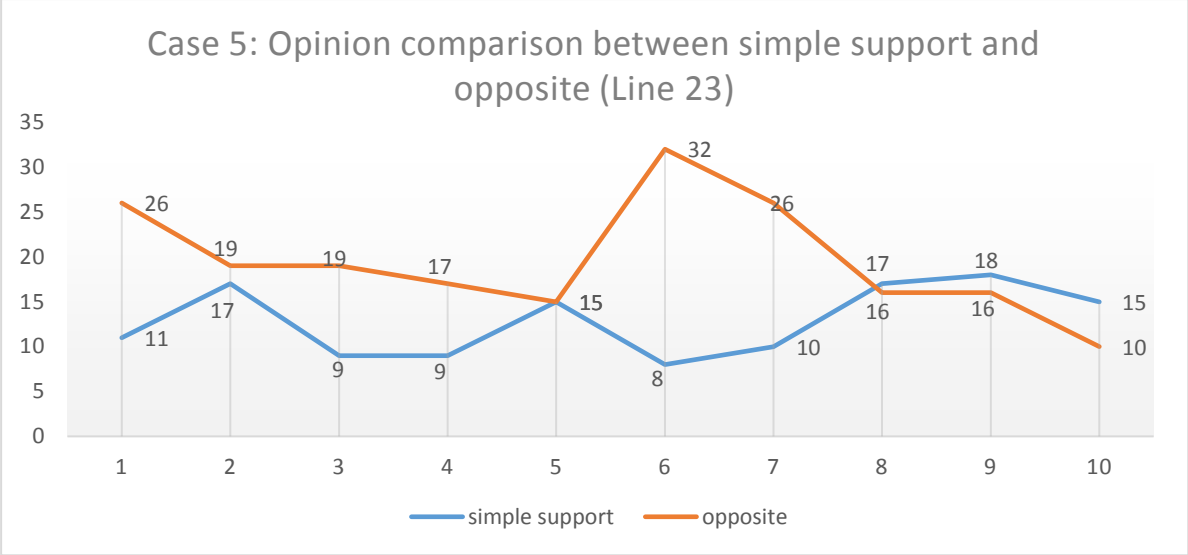
According to Line 22, I have listed all the variation difference values for each unit to measure the interactivity between the simple supporting opinion group and the evidential supporting opinion group in table 17. The sum value is 44.



Case 5: The variation difference value between simple support line and evidential support line (Table 17)

P1-2	|(17-11)-(5-4)|=5
P2-3	|(9-17)-(11-5)|=12
P3-4	|(9-9)-(9-11)|=2
P4-5	|(15-9)-(7-9)|=8
P5-6	|(8-15)-(5-7)|=5
P6-7	|(10-8)-(6-5)|=1
P7-8	|(17-10|-(5-6)|=8
P8-9	|(18-17)-(7-5)|=1
P9-10	|(15-18)-(6-7)|=2

I then have all variation difference values from Line 23 in Table 19. To measure the interactivity between the simple supporting opinion group and the opposing opinion one, I sum up all the nine values, coming out the result as 42.



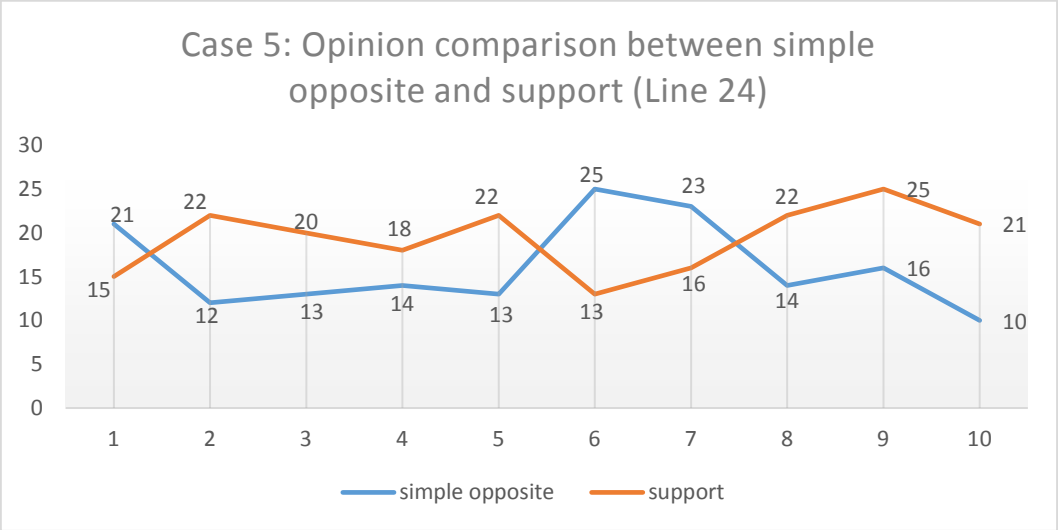
Case 5: The variation difference value between simple support line and opposite line (Table 19)

P1-2	|(19-26)+(17-11)|=1
P2-3	|(19-19)+(9-17)|=8
P3-4	|(17-19)+(9-9)|=2
P4-5	|(15-17)+(15-9)|=4
P5-6	|(32-15)+(8-15)|=10
P6-7	|(26-32)+(10-8)|=4
P7-8	|(16-26)+(17-10)|=3
P8-9	|(18-17)+(16-16)|=1
P9-10	|(10-16)+(15-18)|=9

By comparing the results, it shows that the simple supporting opinion group could interact with the opposing opinion group more intensely. It is to say, as part of the minority opinion camp, the simple supporting opinion group could interact more with the opposing opinion group from the different opinion camp, rather than the evidential supporting opinion group from the same opinion camp. This could give us some clue to believe that the role of moral intuition could play a part in the deliberation considered between different opinion groups.

For further understanding the deliberation between the majority opinion camp and the minority opinion one, I have the simple opposing opinion group from the non-mainstream (the minority) opinion camp as the target opinion group. They are under the influence of the supporting opinions as the majority opinion in this case, and the evidential opposing opinions as the minority one. After I have all the variation difference values for measuring the interactivity

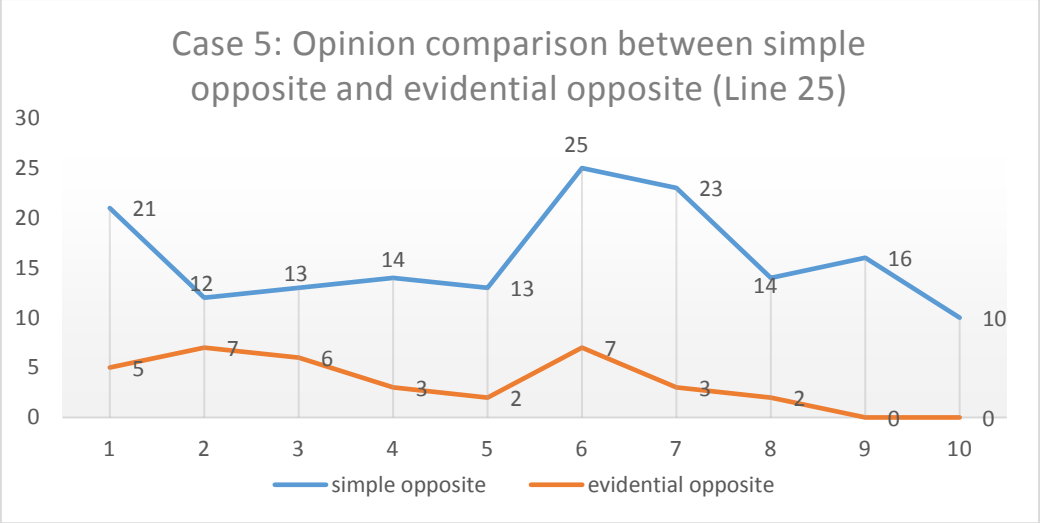
between the simple opposing opinion group and the supporting opinion one in Line 24, I sum up all the values listed in Table 19 for the result 39.



Case 5: The variation difference value between simple opposite line and support line (Table 19)

P1-2	|(22-15)+(12-21)|=2
P2-3	|(20-22)+(13-12)|=1
P3-4	|(18-20)+(14-13)|=1
P4-5	|(22-18)+(13-14)|=3
P5-6	|(25-13)+(13-22)|=3
P6-7	|(23-15)+(16-13)|=11
P7-8	|(22-16)+(14-23)|=3
P8-9	|(25-22)+(16-14)|=5
P9-10	|(21-25)+(10-16)|=10

Next in Line 25, I calculate the variation difference values for measuring the interactivity between the simple opposing opinion group and the evidential opposing opinion group. As the result of summing up all the values in Table 20, I have 42.



Case 5: The variation difference values between simple opposite line and evidential opposite line (Table 20)

P1-2	|(12-21)-(7-5)|=11
P2-3	|(13-12)-(6-7)|=0
P3-4	|(14-13)-(3-6)|=4
P4-5	|(13-14)-(2-3)|=0
P5-6	|(25-13)-(7-2)|=7
P6-7	|(23-25)-(3-7)|=2
P7-8	|(14-23)-(2-3)|=8
P8-9	|(16-14)-(0-2)|=4
P9-10	|(10-16)-(0-0)|=6

Comparing the results, it shows that the interactivity between the simple opposing opinion group with the supporting opinion group is more intense in this case. It is to say, as part of the minority opinion camp, simple opposing opinion group could interact more with the supporting opinion group from the majority opinion camp than the evidential opposing opinion group from the same opinion camp. Therefore, it is hard to say if moral intuition has an effect in the deliberation between the majority opinion and the minority speaking of the simple opposing opinion group.

7.1.6 Discussion

Learning from the cases above, we have collected some evidence of moral values playing a role for the opinion formation of online simple opinion group in deliberation in two dimensions, the advantage and the disadvantage, and the majority and the minority. In three cases, non-mainstream/ minority simple opinions interacted more with the minority opinions rather than

majority opinions. In two cases, the simple mainstream/advantaged opinions interacted more with the minority/disadvantaged opinions from different opinion camp, rather than the advantaged opinions from the same opinion camp. The moral values detected in here can be more understood as moral intuition, which is the moral judgment usually stimulated correspondingly by certain moral environment. For most online deliberation cases, moral behaviours do not happen under a systematized thinking of ethics for decision-making process. For most online participants, they make certain moral judgment by thinking inwardly based on a sketchy representation of facts to guide their behaviors. As the similar context of giving aesthetic judgment, people are able to make such moral judgment at the moment without really trying, because they barely ruminate a process like a complicated moral mental analysis. As a result, even though theoretically rationality plays a very important part in making moral judgment, the process in reality is more reflected in an extension of emotions and affective context. In other words, once individuals are stimulated by certain moral context during the deliberation process, emotions and intuitions will trigger relevant moral intuition, and making corresponding moral judgment, further cause certain communication behavior with moral meaning. Such behaviors, as the way we see them, are traceable in all five cases we randomly choose from the sample materials.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that the phenomenon of moral intuition is also limited by the specific online deliberative settings. First of all, unlike offline deliberation, online public forum style of deliberations usually ends up either with reaching a consensus or a total collapse. Rather, the moral phenomena can be varying depends on different types of participants, or different roles one participant switching from one to another during deliberation on the individual level. As a result, it can cause some issues. For example, the opinion could only represent one's preference at that moment, which makes the moral intuition which one counts on to form and express the opinion very momentary. Also, certain moral behaviors could be untraceable precisely by this model, for example those self-deliberation (self-reflection) uninvolving text-based expressions. On the general level, consensus cannot be standardized for measuring morality, because the topic is usually dying with the public attention subsiding for not able to attract enough people giving opinions. In other word, it is hard to say, how big, or if there is a chance at all, for reaching consensus, considering open-end is usually the case in the online forum style of deliberation.

However, such communication in online forum can still considered as a deliberative process aiming to arriving consensus as the intuitive goal. By talking to all the participants, being agreed and recognized is one of the basic, irresistible needs for opinion expression. The result of not reaching the consensus, in this sense, cannot offset seeking for agreement, common ground, recognition and acceptance as the subjective desire. For that reason, the moral intuition can still be approached from the aspect of consensus-seeking as a motivation and a direction of online deliberation.

Therefore, the findings can tell in a general sense that the potential for certain cases might be better than the another. For example, in Case III, we had four opinion groups arranged in a sorted order based on their count: Simple opposite > evidential opposite > simple support > evidential support. We also know that the simple opinions from each opinion camp are the dominant influencer leading the trend of the whole opinion camp. Therefore, when simple opposition opinions interacted more with the evidential opposition opinions, and simple support opinions interacted more with the evidential support opinions, it means there is a chance that the interactivity within one opinion camp is more intense than between different opinion camps. As a result, the deliberative influence could be more likely to polarize different opinions, rather than aggregate them. However, in Case V, by comparing the count of each opinion group, we found out that simple opinions are also the dominant influencer leading the trend of each opinion camp. Only simple support opinions interacted more with the opposition opinions, while simple opposition opinions interacted more with the support opinions. It is to say, comparing the interactivity within the same opinion camp, the one between different opinion camps is more intense. Therefore, the deliberation, in that case, could make a chance for different opinions to arrive a consensus if it continued. In other cases, for example Case I and Case II, however, the evidential opinions is the dominant influencer for the opinion camp trend, we need to further measure the extent of interactivity between evidential opinions interacted with themselves in the same opinion camp to understand if the deliberation would lead to opinion polarization or aggregation.

In fact, it will be too arbitrary to understand a deliberation on the moral level by seeing from the possibility of consensus-reaching only in text-based form. Although we can present the possibility of consensus from the reverse change in message numbers between different opinions online, for example the increase of support opinions and the decrease of opposite opinion in numbers, to understand deliberation in moral sense needs more systematic

attribution analysis than just such phenomenon, since the same phenomenon could be the consequence by immoral factors. For example, the inhibiting influence by the majority opinions to the minority opinions can also cause the decrease in minority opinions during opinion expression. In addition, some influence factors are hard to detect only through text, for example liking, sharing, clicking and viewing. They could also, in a way, represent outcomes of deliberation in the moral sense. For that reason, we will further collect more evidence by analyzing interviews from mainly quiet participants for understanding their moral intuition behind the deliberative expressive behaviors.

7.2 Interview analysis

7.2.1 Dialogic features of the quiet participants

7.2.1.1 Being more mutual respectful? High sensitivity to different opinions

By talking with them, I noticed that participants were generally sensitive to different opinions, especially in the context of discussion. First, they seemed to be always aware of the "fact" that where there is expression there is difference. For them, Divergence is inevitable. Deliberation, most of the time, is not an approach they think to settle difference, but a way of creating difference that could worsen the communication.

"From my online deliberation experience, I think it (to make consensus) is extremely hard. Sometimes even though your logic is very persuasive, having firm evidence to support it, there are still people accusing you that you are wrong." (Michael)

"Even though some people have no obvious difference at the beginning, they would come up with some during the deliberation. It's inevitable." (Na)

Moreover, when they were asked about their past deliberation experience, 21 participants out of 30, mentioned that even though they have learned how to put their emotions aside, they can always be stirred by the expression of different opinions in deliberation.

"I realized my emotion can be largely influenced by the discussion atmosphere and environment. If the person you are talking to is very nice and mannerly, for example even though we don't really agree with each other, they pay attention to what to say, and how to say it. I'll do the same to them too. But if they constantly accuse me, making me feel unconformable, of course I'm going to bring some attitude. In that case, it's highly possible that we are going to break up." (Zheng H)

"Personally, I know how to calm my mind when I'm discussing with someone. But sometimes when you talk to someone, especially someone who doesn't agree with you, I will be emotionally aroused, and be very negative. I will want to attack back. This is the reason why I don't usually participate in discussions. I know once I express my opinion no matter how, there must be someone who attacks me with different opinions. I will very likely to attack back." (Michael)

Here I found two interesting contradictions to explain such high sensitivity to different opinions. First, 20 out of 30 participants, mentioned that they would not expect others to accept their opinions. And they prefer to seek common points while reserving difference as the outcome of deliberation. In later conversation, however, more people admitted that they want to express themselves, get the approval of others and be recognized as a result of deliberating with other people. More importantly, they want the result of the deliberation to be that other people are persuaded by their opinions.

"When I talk my opinions, surely I'd try my best to refute them if they don't agree with me. If I can't, I'll try to find more evidence, or rethink this question." (PSK)

"I feel I'm always too eager to prove myself, using the information I can find to conquer the others." (PaPa)

"I try to be very cautious when I express my opinion online. If I want to share some opinions, I want to make sure they are very convincing. If I have someone to disagree with me, I'll be in a war mood, preparing beating the opponents and proving myself." (Lv JH)

The other contradiction was that during the interview the majority participants constantly told me how terrible they thought the online communicative environment was. Among the main problems they mentioned, offensive language and aggressive communicative atmosphere were the major reasons for this group of people not actively getting involved in online deliberation. However, the coding revealed that abusive messages, including those using insulting language, accounted for only 18% of the total sample. So, the question is, what has contributed to this impression?

The first contradiction is resulted in the typical Chinese contradictory thinking about "difference". This contradiction is represented in the struggle Chinese people experience between realizing their self-worth and conforming to the understanding of difference in the traditional value of Chinese harmony. On one hand, the "no" answer shows that participants are still heavily influenced by the traditional harmony value, accepting the diversity of the world, and recognize that people should first of all embrace difference with an open mind. On the other hand, from an individual perspective, Chinese people have never suffered from an absence of motivation to achieve self-fulfillment. Although they are taught by harmony culture that self-reflection and self-discipline is the key to the achievement of personal success, this does not affect Chinese people's adherence to individualist values in practice. In fact, Chinese society is considered to be a structure that consists of multiple interwoven relationships with

the individual self at the center. In Fei's early work 'From the Soil' (1992), he described this self-centered social structure, which is reflected in differential modes of association, as consisting of circles such as those made by water around stone. In reality, this is the pattern that Chinese people establish and develop their social network, identifying their roles by building up relationships originating from the self. It revolves around basic everyday interaction between people in Chinese society. Therefore, for Chinese people, it is not hard to separate self-realization as a driving force.

However, morally, there is a recognition that the term "self", in the Chinese mind, must be recognized through its good relationship with others, embodied in the ability to fit into one's group and society. This is considered the source of the first contradiction in Chinese thinking. To achieve self-fulfillment, it is more inclined toward a competitive thinking mode rather than a cooperative one, which results in Chinese understanding of difference as motivation, which in practice is inconsistent with values of harmony. In conflicting deliberation especially, moral thinking is more likely to function as an impulse to realize self-value by persuading more people. In this way, personal values can be transformed into collective values by a discourse approach. In online communicative settings, the ties built between people are not as strong as in offline relationships. And self-realization can be achieved mainly in through written expression. The expression of different opinions, in this case, is easily taken as a direct threat to the realization of self-value, especially negative expressions, and this has increased sensitivity to opinions containing negative feelings and emotions. In the interviews, I found that on the one hand, participants did not like "receiving" different opinions from other people. On the other, they also prefer not to express different opinions to others. For them, negative thoughts are pretty apparent. The emergence of different opinions, expressed in deliberation means either that the communication will turn into a more heated argument, or that it is time to drop out of the conversation.

"The divergence in discussion means I probably should end it. When I feel I'm capable of persuading other people, I may want to continue. I will be very persuasive, and do my best to defend myself. But if I can't, I don't want to be told I'm wrong." (Gao YL)

"If I've already made my mind about something, I won't waver in the position no matter what. If something I'm not sure about, I think I'll drop out of the conversation, or maybe talk later. I know I always want to try my best to persuade other people with my ideas. If I can't, I'll just shut up. (ZC)

"Usually I like to bring the conversation round to something I know well. In that case, I know my opinions will be more persuasive. But if it is something I'm not quite familiar with, and people all have different opinions, I don't usually get involved much." (Zhong R)

The second contradiction is between the general attitude most quiet participants have towards the online communicative environment, and the real online situation based on textual content. Here, I have to distinguish emotion from attitude. Compared to emotion, attitude is more likely to be described as a relatively fixed mindset. It is a more stable mindset and guide to thinking that directs people's behavior in the long-term. It can be seen to be made up of certain impressions that people have, and rests on long term personal understandings, experiences, and knowledge. As a result, changing one's attitude, can hardly happen overnight. Instead, it may take a long-term stimulus to make individuals question what they believe. Relatively speaking, emotion functions as a more instantaneous reaction. Compared to attitude, it is more easily triggered, and triggers immediate behavior change.

Chinese traditional culture considers emotion as a mere epiphenomenon. It teaches people "不以物喜，不以己悲", which means that people should not be pleased by their gains, and not saddened by personal losses, only then they will have stable innermost feelings. So emotional expression is not encouraged in discussions. Consequently, emotion and feelings are not seen as a rational or legitimate reason for action. Furthermore, traditional Chinese culture also denies any connection between individual feelings and social influence. It seems that in the offline world, social movements would immediately lose their legitimacy, if they were based in emotion. This also gives Chinese people a sense that emotional expression is not just useless but could also have negative effects. In practice however, people cannot avoid the influence of emotions on expressive behavior; they cannot totally suppress emotional expression and feelings in communication. This breeds the Chinese logic of action, which is that verbal expression contains hidden emotions, that are even sometimes concealed with their opposite meaning in discourse. However, moods and emotions get expressed in non-linguistic forms, for example in facial expression and body language.

In online settings, verbal expression, is the main approach to communication. People cannot rely on non-visible expressive signs. This triggers emotional expression in words, especially negative ones in the context of conflict, making them an inevitable part of online communication. For participants as readers of information, emotional expressions always trigger aversion, and they usually relate this to irrationality on the part of the expresser.

"I'm not a fan of online communication. Those comments are so subjective and emotional. I prefer something more objective. That's why I don't usually get involved." (Suri)

"I see so many people leaving messages that are very emotional and subjective. I don't like communicating with people like that. I would feel like I'm wasting my time." (Wang LL)

"For me, normally people who express emotionally online are those less intelligent, less mannerly, and less knowledgeable. They always let emotions blind their mind, making all their decisions with emotions and feelings." (Guo W)

"Just as in offline communication, I prefer to avoid those messages with strong emotions and feelings, because I don't want to be influenced. I don't want to discuss by being irrational like them." (Wang ZR)

On the other hand, when they do get involved in online deliberation by expressing themselves in this environment full of different opinions and conflicts, their high sensitivity also leads to greater recognition of negative tone of expression, such as sarcastic, critical, hostile and aggressive comments. They always contribute to intense arguments and unsatisfying outcomes. This unpleasant communicative experience further confirms their negative feelings/emotions about the online deliberative environment, and becomes a general attitude. In fact, the negative comments about online environment from most participants were all based on their unpleasant online experience online, even though they have only experienced these a few times:

"Most of the time, even a slight disagreement would make me feel the unfriendly tone. For the best, in my mind, I would want to calm down, and stop the discussion. But usually in reality, I just can't help, like I can feel my anger like fire rising up, I will get very emotional, say something I know I will probably regret later. But I just can't help it." (Wu QY)

"When I encounter divergence, I will be instinctively very agitated, because I don't understand why people don't "listen". I just want them to "listen" to me." (2jin)

"For me, I feel like tone is very important. Sometimes I didn't mean to let people agree with me, like if their tone is nice, I would like to believe they actually have listened my opinions, even though the divergence is still there. And even then, I would want to accommodate myself, making some compromise. But if their tone is not nice, I would be more uncompromising, or even become just as bad as them. It's hard for me to agree any opinions in that case." (Zhong R)

Therefore, even though the quiet participants may not be a group of people who prefer to express themselves emotionally online in the first place, they are highly sensitive to different opinions. Because of that, they could form a negative impression to online environment in general, and that impression can be easily confirmed by any unpleasant online experience later. In return, they can become a group of people who can be easily triggered emotionally in conflicting context.

It also points to the finding that the quiet participants consciously expect to be emotionally taken care of as a precondition for making a move, or expressing themselves online. Due to their concern about negative comments, they usually have very high expectations and

requirements when selecting a communicative partner in deliberation. In the offline environment, consideration, in the emotional sense, for people all involved in the communication is essential to maintain the communicative relationship. It is usually considered mutual and reciprocal. That is, as a speaker, you have to consider the listener's emotion in expressing your opinion. And when speakers' emotions get a good response, it encourages them to return the same when they are listeners. However, such emotional expectation seems to be impractical in online settings.

For one thing, although the value of harmony, mutual respect, and self-reflection is highly appreciated for building a good relationship, I found quiet participants involving in online expression usually have strong belief in their formed opinions. Their high expectations of their own self-presentation mean that they always start prepared. In the interviews, most participants said that once they have formed their opinions, they are not easily influenced by different opinions online.

"If I haven't formed my own opinions, I may listen to the others. There is no need to argue or anything. You have opinions to say, and I listen. But if it's something I have my own standpoint, and my own opinions, I'll argue, and keep arguing with people who don't agree with me." (Lv JH)

"Usually I already have my standpoint before I discuss the topic with anyone. I'll still listen to people, but just listen. I mean it's not going to hurt you for listening right? I don't want to engage argument, even though I still disagree with them." (Huang XB)

"I'm not good at persuading people, but I tend to keep my opinion. Of course, I'll let people know why I have such opinions, offering some evidence and information. But I would prefer to end up discussion with everyone accepts my opinions." (Wang ZR)

"I intend not to believe any opinions can be accessed in public. I'd prefer to learn the topic with more objective information on my own." (Wu Q)

Moreover, in the online communicative environment, deliberating with strangers, concerns about possible negative comments are even stronger for quiet participants, which encourages them to make even higher demands of their own expressive performance. More importantly, the other-orientation function in quiet participants' expression will not be a positive communicative interaction in online settings, promoting deliberative thinking and behaviour, for example being considerate of others' feelings, situations and standpoints. In the context of conflict, other-orientation means that quiet participants put too much weight on negative evaluation, resulting in great psychological let-down as a result of the difference between expectation and reality. In such conditions, once they decide to express themselves online, it means that they feel great pressure to deliver a good expressive performance. In this case,

expression is only about persuading, but does not aim to mutually understand. As a gambler, the bigger the stake is, the more effort they put in to winning the game. As a result, online expression for the quiet participants will not necessarily lead to opinion transformation based on mutual understanding and respect, but the opposite.

7.2.1.2 Being more considerate? Guanxi (communicative relationship) and other-oriented means of expression

By talking with them, I noticed that emotion is a very important standard by which online participants evaluate their deliberation experience. Among all 30 participants, only 2 mentioned that, even though the discussion atmosphere made them feel quite uncomfortable, they still felt it was a good deliberation experience. The rest 28 participants considered that, even though they learned something from the deliberation, the experience was not a good one if the atmosphere and the people were not satisfactory. Further, 19 participants insisted that they would make adjustments in how they express themselves according to the expressions of others in the deliberation. 11 out of 30 participants thought they would compromise to some extent, if the person they were talking to was nice, had a good attitude and manners, and knew how to manage their feelings and emotions, even though they have diverging opinions in a deliberation.

"For example, I know we will have divergence, but it will be still negotiable for me as long as you have a better attitude. Deliberation needs both sides to show enough respect to each other. I would like to compromise if you make me feel my compromise is worth it. In other words, you have to show me you appreciate my compromise for the sake of our relations." (Liu)

"I think the tone really matters to me. Sometimes I know what they are saying is something you cannot accept. But as long as his tone is very nice, you would feel they have been really "listening" to you, and maybe have thought through what you said. In that case, you would want to pay attention to what they are "saying" too, and thinking about whether you can agree with them in any sense. Otherwise, I would be very determined, stubborn, or even talk back to them with the same bad tone. I don't think we can reach any kind of consensus in that sense." (Zhong R)

"Even if the deliberation ended up with no meaningful outcome, but we had a nice, fun time talking together, it would be a pretty good deliberation to me." (Fan HZ)

However, such emotion-dominated compromise is not unconditional. As what I discovered, it is firstly a judgment about the closeness between the people in the relationship. In interviews, when the participants talk about communicative relationships, there is always a clear line drawn between our-group and the-other-group. For example, almost all the participants told me that when communicating online they would have greater patience and a sense of inclusiveness

towards someone they have some sort of relationship with, such as family members and friends, compared with a stranger. Also, some of them admitted that it would be harder for them to make a compromise for people they are close to, mainly families. This supported by our earlier discussion of the significant role affective bonding can play in communicative behaviors. Here, such affective bonding can make a good balance between self-orientation and other-orientation.

First the deliberative relationship between family members is relatively un-other-oriented. Compared to other social relationships, family ties are based on a blood relationship and are usually stronger than other relationship types, and the cohesiveness of the relationship is a given. Especially in the traditional sense, it is believed that the essence of these relationships cannot easily be destroyed, despite occasional conflict and friction. Taking a simple example, we may have plenty of arguments with our parents while we are growing up. Sometimes they can be quite serious and intense, but it will not easily change the love we have for each other. Family affection, thus, has the power of unconditional forgiving and understanding. Because of this power, expressing different opinions is not considered a threat to the communicative relationship (family ties in this case). When facing divergence that emerges in conversation, moral judgement about an individual's expression of their opinion is more inclined to be self-oriented than other-oriented. Comparatively speaking, individual deliberative behaviors can be franker and closer to one's real thoughts.

Compared to family ties, the affective bonding in friendship is relatively weak, but it is still an affective relationship. Unlike family ties, friendship is not indestructible. Rather, it needs to be well managed and maintained by all the people involved. People like to believe it is instrumental, based on the reciprocal exchange of social resources for example, but it is based on a reciprocity of sentiment. Such affective bonding benefits from sound interaction, and will play a dominant role, determining the expressive behaviour of the people involved in the communication. Usually, it makes the difference between treating people as members of our-group or the-other-group.

Communicative behaviours in friendship are more other-oriented compared to family ties. With general friends, most participants deliberated with a strong sense consideration for others. Especially when dealing with divergence, they seemed to consider friends' opinions more. As a result, they want to be more convincing, and to get as much approval as possible. Consequently, if there is any negative expression in communication, if it damages the

relationship/friendship in some way, this will upset them emotionally too. To avoid the risk of injuring the relationship, people prefer to choose more cooperative actions when the deliberation comes to a dead-end, for example withholding their opinions, compromising or making concessions.

"The way I see deliberative interaction, it is rather about knowing different opinions from the others than proving your own opinions. Sometimes, you could incautiously hurt people with words. If you have experienced enough like that, you wouldn't want to just express yourself frankly. I mean, it's exhausting. So for me, as long as my friends are happy with it, I'd like to keep my opinion in line with the others. It's nothing bad really." (Zheng XJ)

"If I have different opinions from one of my close friends, I will try my best to make him/her understand where I came from. I don't mind going into a lot of detail. If unfortunately, we still can't reach an agreement, I won't insist. But I will avoid such topic in the later communications. I may still listen to them, but I probably won't tell them exactly anymore, if there is any disagreement there." (Wu Q)

Furthermore, in interviews, we found that most participants found a great sense of self-realization in deliberating with close friends. This is mainly because, from one side, being recognized by someone you care about can promote a sense of accomplishment for self-realization. Some participants admitted that, without harming the friendship, they would like to be themselves more, and talk about different opinions with their friends. From the other side, as long as they have faith in the strength of their affective bonds with their friend, most participants would not mind having a heated argument caused by being frank.

"If we are friends, very close to each other, I don't think the divergence would be too serious to break us apart. It's like friendship will always win you know. I wouldn't mind if we disagreed, or argue a little bit in that case." (MTX)

"I would feel like to express myself offline, because you can talk to people you are close to. For example, if you think something and they take it wrong, you have to save them or correct them, right? Because they are friends. Strangers, on the other hand, I wouldn't care." (Zhong R)

"I would discuss throughout if with my good friends, because I want my friends to agree with me of course. And I wouldn't worry so much, because we know each other so well that we won't take it personal. At least I believe so." (Ma S)

After all, we all want to be able to show our true selves, without having to embellish it with someone we care about. At the same time, we also hope people can accept the "real" us unconditionally, out of the affective bonds we have built in our communicative relationships. This is not just to say that we want the advantage of being "seen" as we are, but also that our

shortcomings are more likely to be "forgiven". More importantly, we also have an expectation that our self-value as a specific individual can be appreciated no matter what.

However, for quiet participants, they tend to balance their expressive orientation towards other-orientation in an online situation. As what is found earlier, this group of participants are highly sensitive to different opinions, which means that they are very aware of how they express themselves in online deliberation in the public sphere. Some of them who had limited verbal expressing experience online mentioned that they prefer to organize their words by thinking about how their audience would react to them, because they always try to avoid the potential consequences of expressing different opinions.

"I will say my opinion in a very neutral way. I will imagine how my audience would react. Only when I suppose it wouldn't be too bad, I will post it. I feel the key for a successful communication is you know how to adjust your attitude according to your communication partners." (Wu QY)

"It's like before I want to express my opinion, even though there hasn't been anyone who stands against me, I've already been thinking about how to avoid argument. My strategy is quite simple, which is I would like to put my words in a neutral way, even though my point is quite strong and distinct sometimes." (Zhao YH)

Even with friends in online communicative settings, the image that quiet participants present may be only an imaginary self, which is mostly in line with the self-image, but presented out of consideration for others. As I found in the interviews, they usually put much thought, for example, into their rhetoric, means of expression and its content, if they are aware that their opinion will be shared with their friends.

"In offline deliberation, you have to pay attention to how you say things, even when sharing your opinions with friends. Sometime it is just because you know those people. You can't just say whatever you want to say. You will want to avoid some unnecessary trouble and influence, and make sure people agree with you." (Zheng H)

"I always feel even though I have my opinions about something, once I put it into words, and post it up there, I just can't help speaking insincerely, like to cover up or exaggerate with something. It makes me feel pointless to share thoughts in that way. So, the communication even between friends, and people I know online is not that real to me." (Da S)

On the other hand, when they deliberate with strangers online, most participants showed even less other-orientation in opinion expression. Participants claimed that they don't usually care much about strangers' opinions.

"In online deliberation, if we don't have a sort of relationship between each other, I feel I would be franker. I mean you are just two strangers. There is no affection involved, or anything that can damage your relationship whatsoever." (Chen YD)

"In online environment, it is hard to tell who you are talking to. You don't know their age, their gender, their identity or personality, everything. So, I would say I don't have any concern about those things. I can just say what I want to say." (Shan L)

This is partly because individuals can establish barely any sort of relationship with each other through deliberative communication online. Compared to face-to-face communication, even without affective bonding playing a role in communication, as for example in the first communication between strangers, people still make an effort to follow social rules and culture, since everyone has a basic need to be accepted and recognized. In that sense, we can be tuned to be nice in the offline environment to get what we need, even though sometimes not to get what we want. However, in the online setting such investment of effort is optional, as online communication is usually temporary, self-expression-dominated, and text-based. Moreover, most participants can make a choice to be "invisible", by not presenting themselves in words in online participation. In such situations, the interaction the have with other participants is usually even weaker than in online textual communication, and just remains at a low level by reading, following and liking. These actions make it hard to develop a continuous communication, creating the affective bonds to make people considerate enough in opinion exchange.

7.2.1.3 Being more inclusive? The discourse authority in online expression

All the participants mentioned in the interviews that the information they use and how they use it in deliberation largely relates to the identity they and other people "take" (or play) in the communication. This can be better understood as the textual presentation of status information. In online deliberation between strangers, deliberative communications are described as a "game" in which the only rule is to win, and the prize is 'discourse authority'. In other words, who has the authority and power in their expressions to influence other people. To win authority, deliberative behaviors are more likely to contain self-expression, rather than paying attention to others.

Before further talking about the establishment and maintenance of authoritative expression, I need to make a distinction between the concept of identity and the status. Generally speaking, personal status can be understood mainly as the role one plays in certain social relationships.

In the Chinese context, status can be interactive, which means that one is not labelled with clear and constant personal characteristics. Instead, it has to be formed in interaction with others. Secondly, it marks a person as important by highlighting meaningful social resources and values during the interaction. In this sense, personal status is not in contradiction with identity. For example, people who have a noble identity can usually access more valuable resources, which usually means that they are more easily recognized in social interaction because they can more easily establish their status. Thirdly, to be recognized by others, good role-play is regarded as important. This does have to be based just on particular conditions, such as a noble social title, skills and genuine knowledge, but can also happen through performance and strategy. That is, on the one hand, people make judgements based on certain social resources and abilities, that they can see. On the other hand, other elements, such as tone, attitude, style, behaviour and some characteristics of personal lifestyle, can also play a role in such judgements. This is even more important in the online discourse environment in the sense of role-play, because it offers the chance to increase someone's air of authority in a good performance by "acting" with language.

In the interviews, I found that most participants pay a lot of attention to the status presented in the communicated information. To express online, they are not satisfied with knowing their communication partners as an individual. Moreover, they want to detect personal status information in order to position themselves and their own role in the communication. There is still some consistency of this for communication that takes place in the offline context in China. This always involves the distribution of power in discourse power according to the personal status of the speaking role. It creates the discourse authority, and the dominant position is manifested in the impact and execution of a speech.

"Usually, if I deliberate with peers, I ask if I don't understand anything. I also like to talk about my opinions if I have any. But if I talk to someone, like seniors or experts, I can barely say anything I think." (Yang P)

"I'll give you a simple example, me and my boss. If my boss talks me into anything, even though it is not something you want or agree, you will have to say yes. You will persuade yourself he is right no matter what." (Fan HZ)

"To talk with someone who has higher status, or a better background, you have to learn how to keep a low profile. Something, although you want to say, you need to learn how not to say it directly. But if I'm in a more relaxing environment, like with my friends rather than in the work place, I will let you know what I think." (Guo W)

The examples above show that the quiet participants do pay attention to other people's personal status to decide their expressive behaviors. For one thing, they like to show their respect and worship to someone in authority. The motivation for this attitude partly comes from the need to maintain individual relationships. As I mentioned in the last chapter, in traditional society, higher personal identity, like elders in a family, or the patriarch of a clan, for example, is naturally empowered with legal basis for their personal authority. Such an authoritative identity creates power and influence that impels people with lower status identities to comply. In modern society, these authority positions effectively have greater social status, and are nurtured in the interest of maintaining relationships. To maintain relationships with people who have greater social status, Chinese people admit, means confirming authority status by agreeing and applauding, even though such approval behaviour can sometimes be instrumental and superficial, while lacking a substantive understanding of authority.

Secondly, this creates in turn the quiet participant's motivation to pursue authority status in communications, namely though discourse authority, because of its power to make people conform or keep quiet. In more complex modern society, the effect of traditional ethical values of status and authority have become largely diluted. Authority status is not earned mainly from family or social identity mainly, but more importantly through personal status, taking into consideration other elements, such as the tone of voice, behaviour, clothing, style of handling things and nepotism. Earning a high social identity in this way often requires great effort, but is definitely a much easier way to gain power and authority by establishing personal status. Thus, it makes acting-a-part a popular approach to concocting "discourse authority" in communication.

Compared to the offline environment, discourse authority is the main form of online authority. Due to the limitations of the online communicative setting, non-verbal cues, such as the style of behaviour, manners, nepotism, expression and tone of voice, can be very difficult to access in conversation. For that reason, online participants need new approaches to enable them to establish discourse authority. As I found, a few features mentioned in the interviews participants recognize to create the authoritative expression, including professional and logical information, self-cultivation embodied in the messages, people's social identity and the way of expression. Among them, professional and logical information is the feature mentioned the most for recognizing authoritative and trustworthy messages.

"If I want to make my opinion more convincing, I normally need some knowledge base of my own, some information I learned from books, or just reports and news I heard from other people or online social media." (Suri)

"I tend to use information more objective and fact-based, sometimes based on my own knowledge. If I need to discuss more with people, I'll have to search more professional information." (Zheng H)

"I prefer to form my opinion based on more professional information, for example some data from some official government report, or some facts from official news or more reliable information resource." (ZC)

"If I want people to take my opinions seriously, I'll use more objective information such as knowledge, data, facts." (Ma S)

"I like opinions including more objective information. For example, if you only claim your opinions without your own logic and facts to support them, they can't be very convincing, can they?" (Fan HZ)

However, what makes this interesting is that, as we have mentioned, using professional knowledge and logical information is also the way they prefer to build up discourse authority in their own expression. In the interviews, most participants claimed that they prefer to use more understandable and simple language for talking about topics they are familiar with, especially to people who they think do not know much about it. With less or unfamiliar topics, however, they always use more complicated and professional information and knowledge in communication, even though they say they resent this kind of boring didactic, teaching-style language when other use it.

"If you are talking to someone who is not as familiar as me with this topic, I would like to use very simple and understandable language, such as analogy and metaphor, to make things easier to them. But with someone who may be hard to persuade, you want your argument professional enough, using as much as professional knowledge, terms and logic." (Shan L)

"If we are talking about something I'm familiar with, I'll talk simply. If it is something I don't know much, I want to try to be professional, and I would use big words, professional information stuff." (Wu Q)

In fact, the majority participants mentioned that the high-status social identity would endow online opinions with a sense of authority. They generally revealed more or less antagonistic feelings to so-called the "expert opinion" and "authoritative information".

"But opinion from, for example public intellectuals online, experts from the TV, or anyone so called "professional" is not really working for me. My wife would buy it, but I'm just really resentful of that kind of information. Somehow I always want to do the opposite to what I'm told." (Da S)

"I'm not interested in so called "professional opinions". They like making things extra complicated, abstract with technical terms and unfamiliar words. For what? Not for understanding, for sure. They are just pretending they have some sort of discourse authority." (2jin)

As it is showing that, in the online communicative environment, for both information-givers and information-takers, professional and logical information is considered to play an important role in establishing discourse authority, why social identity which may represent the ability to access and effectively use professional information such as knowledge and logic, does not necessarily promote a sense of authority as much as in the offline conversations? And why in the online environment, professional and logical information is more preferred for topics which people are not so familiar with? We can explain this in two ways.

First, it involves an attitudinal change between the roles of knowledge-user and knowledge-taker. To be specific, discourse authority in online environment is basically reflected in the connection between knowledge-use and discourse power. The function of knowledge-use in the establishment of discourse authority is not really different in the offline and online environments, except in the mind-set of those using knowledge compared with the mind-set of those taking the knowledge in deliberation. This phenomenon is similar to what Hofstadter (1963) described as anti-intellectualism, in his book *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*. There, he pointed out that this is an objection to both intellectuals and modes of thinking that have intellectual features. However, such a mind-set cannot be generally simplified to become anti-authoritarian values, as is usually discussed in the case of populism.

It is to say, in this case, authoritative language may not be the first choice for quiet participants in online expression. As active, expressing, participants, they do not necessarily have high social identity or significance and influence in real life. The aim of their expression is to legitimize their voice by expressing themselves through the internet. Taking the internet as a convenient platform for information, audience and public communication, active expressers can earn support, approval and attention only with speech and language. This largely minimizes the gap created by the sense of discourse authority between people who have unequal social identities in the offline environment. In this way, popular expression online is undergoing a transformation from elite tone to public tone. This transformation emphasizes the value of equality and sincerity as means to remove the inequality of discourse authority that result from the existence of unequal social identity in social reality. As a result, the given sense of authority embodied in one's social identity may not be recognized online, and will be even more resisted by the public.

Moreover, the standard for recognizing the authoritativeness of discourse has been changed in the internet age. Since the age of printed media, authoritative opinions have been recognized by relevant professional knowledge, experience and in-depth thinking, which requires true skills and genuine knowledge in certain fields. The internet offers a convenient and easy platform for people to talk about public affairs. Anyone can access professional, in-depth information and profound logical comments, easily winning discourse authority by copying and pasting. The consequence that "authoritative opinions and information" experience a decline in the accreditation of value. In that sense, it is not necessary for authoritative information to be involved in a speech, or to use professional knowledge and big words. Much more depends on the preference of the online audience in a public deliberation. Active expressers prefer to use a written style that is the opposite of offline social authority, using easier and more provocative language to make as many people as possible fall under their spell, thus, to create a different kind of discourse power.

Therefore, it is not the authoritative content that they resist, such as professional knowledge, opinions and logics. In fact, the resistance of piling up knowledge and big words expresses the drawback of the online communicative setting, which is the separation of verbal expression from moral expression. As we discussed earlier, traditional Chinese morality educates people to take mediocrity as achievement, concession as honor, and tolerance as virtue. Such self-cultivation reflected in moral expression becomes rather the standard in offline communications, for the audience to empower their expression with a sense of discourse authority. However, in the online setting, with only words, it can be quite difficult for people to recognize this function of morality in expressions. Under such conditions, the use of professional knowledge, especially in a more complicated way, can be easily taken as contrary to traditional moral values, such as modesty, by playing authority parading one’s knowledge, tone of voice and words.

Therefore, when they express their opinions online, the quiet participants are usually the group of people who are interested in the competition of discourse authority, and seem to have different ways to win through opinion expression. In the online communication, as people mainly exchange opinions with words, it makes discourse authority establishment largely depend on how people use information. Quiet participants also believe the power of professional and logical information, unless they have special moral considerations for using such information. For topics they are familiar with, the foundation of discourse authority is not

role-play with words and knowledge, but genuine ability of information management and knowledge-learning. To distinguish this from the role-play using professional and logical information, more than half of the participants mentioned that they feel the opinions are more acceptable and convincing if they are presented in an oral, humorous, popular and friendly style to make the professional and logical content easy to understand to the ordinary others.

"There is one more thing I appreciate online discussion, which is people can Tucao[18] (吐槽). Namely we can use humor as a weapon, not to personally attack each other, but to comment and express different opinions. I think it's a way highly related to not only one's learning and culture." (Suri)

"I think the way you express your opinions is crucial. Sometimes it's not because your opinion is not professional or logical enough, you just need to find a better way to make it more acceptable. I'd quite enjoy a discussion if people involved can better express their opinions in a way humorous, fun or even "self-deprecating". You know they are still trying to convince you with their different opinions, but at least it gives you a more delightful atmosphere." (Michael)

"Especially concerning that you have say something different, I'd like to joke about it, talk about it like a dry humor. I think people wouldn't think you are playing authority or something, just think you are fun to talk to, which usually can achieve a better result." (Da S)

"Usually I don't make myself sound so serious, I like very oral and informal that kind of language style, even though I still need to use some professional information. I'd like to put it in a way more popular and easier to understand, such as metaphor, analogy or make some jokes. I feel you need to make it interesting enough, especially when you have some serious information involved, to attract people." (Linda)

What more interesting is, such special expressing language style can be recognized as a signature which may help the participants find or attract the other "talkers" who have the similar expressing style as a sort of identity in the forum. First of all, it can set the tone of the discourse style. A loose collection of quiet participants who are on the same level of intelligence may share interest in a common topic, but may not necessarily be bonded to engage or stay in the communication, and to further contribute and develop such sustainable interaction. In that sense, they can be hold together by an interaction context featured with a congenial and lively setting of knowledge language style. Even though the language was loose for quiet participants as message readers, once they engage in opinion expression, the special language style can be slowly developed in a more intimate sense that forms the forum's identity synergy rooted in the commonalities of professional, experience and values (Markovsky and Chaffee, 1995; Pratt and Foreman, 2000).

[18] Tucao refers to a kind of quick, humorous in a sharp, sarcastic way of expression which are perceived as criticism norms in discussions.

"I think you have to be kind of selected even talking about expressing online. For me at least, I think it's really important to talk to someone who is on the similar cognitive, intelligent and educative level as me. Such communication is efficient and high-quality, or it's just time-wasting." (Wang ZR)

"Talking people online is different from offline. In offline world, you know who you are talking to. If this person is not on the same level with you, I'm talking about things such as knowledge, value and cognitive ability, you don't waste your time even trying to start a discussion with him/her. But you can't know who you are talking to in online world until you really engage a discussion. You put them on the same level with you in the first beginning, then you realize they could be totally different kind of people. Sometimes, it's not the conflict frustrates you, it's the person you are talking to. You need to find a right person." (Guo W)

"I engage less and less now. Sometimes I feel it is not my circle. I feel those who are very active in online expression always have their own circles online. For example, they always have some regular 'talk partners' paying attention to their comments, replying to them. No matter it's like a common you can find someone to share, or you just need someone to listen to you, or you just feel to learn something different from the others, it makes the discussion meaningful with the right person." (Lao X)

7.2.2 Is it really bad? Talking the moral meaning as potential influence

7.2.2.1 The self-distanced perspective in expression-exclusive online participation

In interviewing them, I noticed most of the interviewees can be self-reflective by taking the perspective of an "outsider" in online deliberation. By participating in online deliberation quietly, we found that quiet participants are more likely to be able to learn in deliberation in self-reflective way. This is one of the benefits of the online communicative setting in which people can participate by maintaining a self-imposed distance, and it is even more important if one wishes to be able to self-reflect later. In practice, self-reflection cannot simply be understood as a moral requirement. Instead, because it always involves emotion, it is actually better considered as moral intuition embodied in the communicative behaviors and thinking of participants.

First, I shall define what the self-distanced perspective is. Generally speaking, self-reflection happens when people encounter negative events, or experience negative emotions. Such negative feelings push people to think back, and try to understand the situation at that time, analyzing and evaluating the causes and reasons, so that they can avoid such negative experiences in the future. However, self-reflection does not always have a positive influence on people or their future experience. For example, in Smith and Alloy's (2008) study, "Rumination", one form of self-reflective activity is understood to have negative influence by triggering negative emotions and experience rather than by effectively avoiding them. This happens in situations in which people realize they have not performed as well as they were expected to perform, especially if there have been negative consequences or influences which may contribute to their realization of the latter (Smith and Alloy, 2008). This is considered to

be a passive emotional regulation strategy. Even though it may be triggered by some positive cognition in the beginning, it causes more negative feelings during the process of filling the gap between perception and cognition.

This is rather different from the idea of self-reflection discussed in deliberative theory. If we track back to early Habermas's work, there are three main aspects of the concept of self-reflection in his understanding. First, he put a positive spin on self-reflection for all the fine and positive characteristics it can bring people at the level of cognition and emotions. In his book *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas (1971) first considered self-reflection as an approach to developing cognition based on human interest. In his view, interest is the orientation. And knowledge is required to be constructed from a series of elements, including possibility, effectiveness, objectivity and significance, to make so called 'constructed knowledge' (Habermas, 1971). Self-reflection, in this sense, is the process of actively constructing knowledge led by interest, oriented towards problem-solving, namely the process of forming rational cognition (Habermas, 1971). It embodies the demand for the pursuit of human rationality.

Secondly, self-reflection is a self-critical process triggered by negative performance and disadvantages. In his later understanding, he emphasizes the importance of criticism in self-reflection, pointing out that, from the perspective of cognition, people self-reflect to make improvements in their lives. This is the need of human beings knowing themselves critically. From the perspective of emotion, negative feelings enable people to self-reflect critically. This is the need of human beings avoiding negative feelings in the interests of their own well-being.

Thirdly and most importantly, the key to the benefit of such critical self-reflection is for individuals to recognize that the key problem is themselves rather any other external factors. It means that people being responsible for themselves. This means being able to separate themselves from the problematic self, to be able to review the situation and know the self from the perspective of an "outsider". Ayduk and Kross (2010) called this the self-distanced perspective - the perspective used to bring oneself out of a problematic situation, reviewing one's own experience from the perspective of a bystander. It takes a stand contrary to the self-immersed perspective. The self-immersed perspective, on the other hand, is a perspective used to put oneself back into a past situation, reviewing the whole experience from the perspective of other parties and witnesses.

In offline settings, the self-immersed perspective is generally the preferred perspective for people to engage any communicative activities (Ayduk and Kross, 2010). Selecting and taking information can hardly escape the impact of the responses of others in offline communication. For example, when people agree with others about their opinion, they like to confirm the information. A response, at this point, works as a self-assessment, which can trigger an emotional interaction between the participants involved in the communication. The emotions referred to are not just the basic ones, such as happy, sad, angry, afraid and surprised, but also those produced by the effects of self-reflection, called "self-conscious emotions" by Tracy and Robins (2004), such as guilt, shame, embarrassment, jealousy and pride. Such emotions embody the cognitive process of performing self-attribution (Tracy and Robins, 2004). That is to say, typically self-concern can begin when individuals are stimulated by negative self-presence. At that moment, negative emotions work as a catalyst to push individuals to review the past, analyze and try to find reasons. Self-conscious emotions are those which are created when individuals attribute negative emotions to internal factors, namely when they have the cognitive ability to reflect on the self (Lewis, 1995). As a result, such emotions especially influence people to take a self-immersed perspective on more subjective judgments and behaviour (Tracy and Robins, 2007).

As I found, the online settings offer participants some favorable conditions for choosing a self-distanced perspective over a self-immersed perspective. For one thing, participants can make a choice whether or not to respond online. Most quiet participants are highly sensitive to negative evaluation and their emotions are easily aroused in communication. In that case, it is easier for them to choose to participate quietly, by liking, sharing, recommending, clicking and viewing, rather than confronting the response. This also means it allows them to be an "outsider" with a perspective of self-distance in most online cases. These forms of participation enable participants to access information without triggering self-concern. What we learned from the interviews, from all the participants was that it is much easier for them to learn from online deliberation without engaging in verbal expression. This is especially true when the communication happens between strangers, or at the beginning when their opinions have not yet settled down.

On the other hand, it allows them to reconstruct relevant informative experience based on their own understanding and experience without the interference of emotion. In this case, they

unconsciously complete what Habermas discussed as the process of forming cognition through non-interrupted self-reflection by trying to avoid negative emotional experience as a goal. Most of quiet participants mentioned that they like browsing deliberative messages online for good ideas and perspectives. This will inspire them, improve their opinions or even completely change them. The messages they "like" (by clicking the like button) usually contribute a lot to complete their thoughts.

"I enjoy reading some good messages online, especially the messages including information I didn't know before. I feel my opinion will change to some extent, not exactly like totally agree to him/her, but will move towards to his/her direction." (Michael)

"I do more self-reflection when I'm reading messages than posting. I will think why I come out with this idea; Is there anything to do with my past experience, something like that. Of course, I will read from others for some inspiration too. They help me to form my final opinions." (Gao YL)

"If I'm struggling with something, cannot make up my mind, I would like to go online, reading from other people, to see if I can get some ideas which are convincing enough." (Zheng XY)

"In the online deliberative environment, I can ignore some messages that are very emotional and subjective. I don't want to become a participant like them you know. I only pay attention to those rational enough, informative enough and inspiring enough to me." (Wang ZR)

7.2.2.2 The moral meaning behind the exploratory expression: Simple opinion and "liking"

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the findings show that the quiet participants, when expressing their opinions in the written form, are the group of people who may not behave intuitively on the high level of morality as the ideal deliberation model expected through the online reasoning process. It is to say, they are not enough respectful, considerate and intended to be exclusive when engaging the online opinion-exchange. However, what makes quiet participants a special group apart from other type of online participants is, they prefer to take actions in a one-way communication most of time, namely "liking", writing simple opinions, "sharing", "clicking" and "reviewing". The function of such deliberative activities, even though not interactive, can still be exerted through the online communicative settings. I name online activities like that exploratory expression activities. It is saying, as the main online activities of quiet participants, the study also needs to explore the possible moral meanings behind them to complete our understanding. For that reason, I have considered some findings from the interview, and will discuss them from a perspective of morality below.

First of all, I found the online actions of quiet participants are directly related to what they have perceived in advance. Indeed, they are conditioned to express opinions through observation. For example, even though online communicative world is not a favorable sphere allowing people to get to know who you are talking to in a conversation, most of quiet participants still try to figure out the clues and evidence, so they can pick up a "right" person to talk to. Some participants mentioned that they can tell whether people are really invested in discussions by whether they mean to diverge from the theme context. Usually, digression is considered improper for offline discussion, especially between strangers. It could imply that the person is not really interested, does not know much about this topic, or tried to dodge intense arguments. Digression, in that case, is also considered as a message sent in online settings, to opinion expresser, saying that you are talking to the wrong person.

"Some of them were interested in sure in the beginning, but that does not mean they know enough about the topic. So, when they realized they don't know enough, and there is nothing they can contribute to the discussion, they would change the topic. Probably it's because you two come from different background, or you are not on the same cognitive level that you just can't contribute to a proper deeper discussion together." (Suri)

Some of them make a choice through the professional information and logical language included in the comments.

"If I want to talk to him/her. I'll tell him/her what I know at the beginning. I can tell on what level he/she is by reading his/her replies. Like if he/she pointed out something he/she doesn't understand, I'll know he/she probably is not very familiar with this topic, at least not as much as I am. I'll explain to him/her with very easy language then. If he/she picks on me right away, I would consider he/she probably knows something, and I'll have to try harder. Usually this would turn into a long discussion, fierce and long." (Wu Q)

The others rely on the emotional cues presented in the messages; for example, according to whether the tone and expressions nice enough to make them feel comfortable to stay in the discussion.

"If I sense he/she is a nice person to talk to, I would properly join the discussion, talking about my opinions. I mean I can enjoy a good deliberation too. Like even if something I wouldn't agree, I'll try to understand as long as he/she is pointing out in a nice way and not completely in nonsense. Even though I probably would regret afterwards, like why I didn't express myself more, I should have said more. But I think a nice tone and expression can make a really big difference to me." (Wu QY)

Otherwise, most quiet participants mentioned that the opinion environment has a great matter for them to decide if they will take an action and to take what action.

"The climate of the discussion is very important to me. If I feel everybody there is very keen to talk, wants to share some opinion information with each other, rather than being very personal and controversial, I'd like to participate with my opinions. The reason why I don't express myself much anymore, it is because the deliberation environment is not very nice. For example, there are a lot of extreme opinions, or people are just not being very accepted with different opinions. I don't want to deliberate in that environment." (Michael)

"There are a lot of opinion-related posts and comments online. I'll read some of them. Only when I feel most of them are very similar to mine, I'll write something, commenting or relying, to engage the discussion." (Chen YD)

"Normally I will reply or comment down below. I will read some messages before I engage. Only when I see something I agree, or the opinion is very similar to mine, I'll engage with my own opinion." (Fan HZ)

"The online discussion is rarely very related to your interest. Most of them is public affairs. So, I'll be only an audience, reading comments and replies from other people first, to see what other people think about it. If there are some opinions are really different, even the opposite to mine, I'll think if I should have my opinion posted or not. Sometimes, I will reply a little bit, put on some reasons there, trying to prove my point makes more sense." (Shan L)

In that sense, exploratory expression activities such as "liking" and leaving simple opinions, is not as simple as an approach they choose to express themselves, rather a reaction to the talk partner and the online opinion environment they have observed and perceived. For quiet participants who are highly sensitive to different opinions and the negative emotional experience brought from conflicting arguments, it is understandable that they like to avoid any head-on confrontation at the risk of challenging other active opinion expressers directly by expressing different opinions themselves. By liking and posting simple opinions, quiet participants get their own voice heard online without a series of negative feelings and the consequences of negative evaluation. According to the interviews, 17 out of 30 participants said, "liking" is their main online deliberative activity. 20 of the participants said they mainly participated in online deliberation by expressing simple supportive opinions. However, as what I found from the earlier analysis of abusive messages, the online discussion environment is not as bad as they thought. At this point, I wonder if their perception of the opinion climate and situation is always right in this situation.

As it has been discussed in the earlier chapter, quiet participants usually form their opinions independently. They prefer to search information professional, official and objective through search engine, developing their own opinions by well-knowing of the topic and based on their own knowledges. In such process, the online comments, posts and replies as opinions from other people have little influence in a way to substantially change their opinions. Just as what I found, most of them, firstly, do not engage in massively and widely reading the online opinions. Secondly, the purpose of reading is mainly for triggering thinking, inspiring thought and perceiving the opinion climate. In that sense, it is arguable that if the opinion climate they perceive to guide their further actions of online expression is the general climate discussed.

The opinion climate, which described by Moy and Scheufele (2000) as "the aggregate distribution of opinions on a given issue" (p.7), is considered to have direct correlation with opinion expression in online environment (Salmon and Neuwirth, 1990; Pan and McLeod, 1991; Glynn et al., 1996). However, the definition of perceived opinion climate is varying. For example, according to Salmon and Neuwirth's (1990) study, opinion climate does not exist in a single, integral, and consistent form. They can be sensed on a social level (for example Noeele-Neumann, 1974), or on a contextual level such as inner-group climate (Asch, 1951). Related to online discussions, the opinion climate can be referred to the offline opinion climate, or the opinion climate in certain forum for example (for example Yun and Park, 2011). Some studies distinguish the online climate from the opinion environment in which individual participants reply to take a further expression action, arguing that they can be inconsistent sometime. To that point, the opinion environment personally perceived by individual participants can play a bigger role determining the further action (Yun and Park, 2011; Xu, 2013).

Therefore, there is a reason to believe that the climate of the opinion environment (the situational climate) in which quiet participants perceive and decide their further expression action such as "liking" or just posting simple opinion, could not always aligned with the general climate, since they only read very limited amount of opinions. In other word, the situational climate could make them consider they are with the majority, or the minority in online forum, thus encouraging them to "like", or expressing opinions only very briefly. The question now is which the case is.

As I found out, most of quiet participants prefer to express their opinions, textually or non-textually, as a way to support and supplement the opinions they agree. However, non-textual expression is more often applied in the situation where they "want to say something, but afraid of ugly argument". In other word, it could mean, when the situational climate they perceive at that moment makes them feel their opinions are not the "popular" ones, but they still have strong urge to express, they more likely to "speak out" in a non-textual way.

"I could be strange in a way that I'm always attracted by something unusual. For example, if everyone is saying one thing, I'd like to know another. In other word, if this is the information I've already known, it wouldn't catch much of my attention. I'd like to keep my thought critical and independent. So, if I see someone is like me, I'd give him/her a 'like'." (Wu QY)

"If I'm interested in a topic, I'll read some comments first. I have the desire to express myself the most when I see some opinions I strongly disagree with. I'd leave a message expressing my different opinions. But it's rare. Normally you don't want to incur argument. So, I can keep my opinion simple, or just liking someone whose opinion I agree." (Guo W)

"If I found other people's opinions are different from mine, especially when I found the way they express their opinions is very sharp and aggressive, I usually choose not to engage the discussion. If I really feel like I want to say something, I mean I do have my emotions, feelings and opinions about things, I'd like some opinions I agree. It's a kind of expression as well for me." (Wang LL)

In fact, such thought meets the profile of the quiet participants, if we consider the way they express different opinion in a supportive form. Usually, for people who enjoy actively expressing online, they have strong mind and adhere to a firm stance. In that case, different opinions can trigger intense emotional attack more easily in discussion. For quiet participants who have concerns about negative evaluation, it is a much easier way to express their mind for less communicative cost.

More importantly, it could unconsciously create another layer of opinion climate which encourages the minority opinion holders to express their "unpopular" opinions, or to raise the doubts for potential participants and even lurkers about the mainstream opinion hold by the majory (the minority influence). It is to say, for example, if for most comments down below are supporting ones, while certain opposing opinion gets considerable amount of "likes", the potential individual participants would question which one the more genuine public opinion is. This layer of opinion climate created by non-textual opinion expression actions can be a promising opinion environment for especially the minority (unpopular) opinion group. It can be a possibility that, for most quiet participants who may have the similar opinions, but have not put in writing for some reasons, can be expressed by "liking" the "unpopular" posted opinions in online forum. This kind of expression can make such opinion not the minority opinion, because the group of opinion holders who express themselves in a non-textual way may not the minority in a real sense. Therefore, it can give the situation, momentary climate, encouraging, especially unpopular opinions exposure online.

Chapter VIII Conclusion

8.1 The research question

The study aimed to collect inductive evidence to answer the question: What can we understand the online society in China through deliberation? Since the dawn of the information age, the development of the internet has greatly extended the space available for public deliberation and deliberative experience in China. First connected to the world wide web in 1994, China's online community grew at an astonishing rate, and became the biggest internet market in the world, with 731 million internet users (China Internet Network Information Center [CINIC], 2017). Although China has been criticized as a place that is highly censored and regulated by the one-party state, the public still has both the space and the opportunity, to some extent, to participate in the rational discussion of public affairs online (Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Gong and Yang, 2010; French, 2008; Zhou, 2008; Yang and Liu, 2014). As sensitive information is more and more easily accessed, and ways to circumvent censorship are becoming more and more widespread and convenient, it has been a trend for online discussion influencing this well-educated and skillful generation of interest users to participate more and more in public affairs (Jiang, 2010; He, 2006; Warren, 2008; Yang, 2009).

Against this background, deliberative theory provides a good platform and opportunity for students of civil society to take a closer look at changes and developments happening in the Chinese environment. As a critical rethink of the liberal version of democracy in theory and practice (Chambers, 2003; Laden, 2000), deliberative theory aims to improve the ways in which we promote democracy and institutions that promote citizen participation, so that we can meet the normative expectations of democracy more efficiently. It tries to offer a more reasonable, just and practical approach to understand and improve mass participation based on the reality of pluralism and diversity by paying attention on communication and the power of communication, including the cognitive ability of participants and the cultivation of moral quality in reasoning (Gutmann and Thompson, 2000; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Mendelberg, 2002).

Therefore, by applying it to the internet as a normative theory, deliberative theory can help us to understand the online society associated and featured with communication (Wood and Smith, 2004; Yang, 2009) by taking an approach of deliberation. For one thing, I brought together deliberative theory with Chinese people's experience of participation in this study, extracting the normative deliberation part of the theory, as a guide to investigating deliberative practice.

For another, such empirical studies in particular also shoulder the responsibility to further apply and develop the theory, namely, to search for conditions and requirements in different contexts from democracy, in order to develop our understanding of deliberation.

While focusing on the deliberation-related form of participation online, the current study aimed to yield insights to some fundamental questions for understanding the online society in China: what is the online situation of deliberation in China, and if and how online participants can enhance their ability or cultivating their morality through participating online deliberation? Relate it to the China case, the controversy is also about the way associating online participation with the cultural, social- political contexts in which their practice is rooted. This helps me arrive at some conclusions by understanding the findings with a more local mind, which makes the process of interpretation more worthwhile than the findings alone. As such, this study has attempted to contribute to the development of deliberative theory through an investigation of online deliberative practices in China.

8.2 Summery and interpretation of main findings

8.2.1 Understanding online society at a cognitive level

8.2.1.1 Findings and interpretation from online materials

First, based on a model of information exchange between different opinions, I investigated the online deliberative environment and the influences it has on people as quiet participants, and discovered some of its features, which will now be discussed. Firstly, the content of online messages is dominated by expressions of support. This could mean people prefer to express opinions in an agreeing way rather disagreeing with each other. This could lead to a different direction from what has been emphasized in deliberative theory; that the diversity and conflict in opinions is giving the condition, meaning and value to deliberation. What I found in consistence with the theory is, the more homogeneous the opinion environment is, the more of an inhibiting effect it has on opinion expression, and is further responsible for the reduction of the information increment as an outcome of deliberation. Further analysis on online materials shows that, in more homogeneous opinion environments surprisingly, the contribution from the ‘majority opinion camp’ to information increment is less than from the ‘minority opinion camp’. It is to say, for example, even though the evidential information from both a supporting opinion group and an opposing one is significantly diminished, in the case which the supporting opinions take an absolutely dominant position (the more homogeneous opinion environment in other words), the decline from the supporting opinion group could be more dramatic. This is

different from some findings of former online deliberation literatures. Usually, with the tendentiousness of public opinion is being formed during the reasoning process, the opinion climate created by the majority is believed can large suppress the expression of the minority (Price, et al., 2002; Moy and Scheufele, 2000), and thus to affect the information increment in general.

Considering the antagonism by focusing on online abusive messages, I found that the flaming phenomenon which is considered widely existing in online deliberation is not very marked in the sample messages. The abusive messages only make up 18% of the total sample. Further, it has been found that the abusive information is more prolific in opposing messages than in supporting ones, which means people would prefer to use more aggressive and abusive language when expressing different opinions. Another finding gives more confusion to the online deliberative environment on the subject of abusive messages. The online data shows the pure abusive messages take the largest proportion of the whole abusive messages, whilst the smallest in evidential messages. In other words, it could mean that people are less likely to use aggressive and abusive language when they are actually engaging in a reasoning process with each other.

On the other hand, the findings also reveal some conclusions addressing the cognitive abilities of online participants. From the online materials, I found out that the online deliberation as an information base is dominated by subjective information offered by participants on the comparatively low ability level. According to the analysis, the more subjective-type information, including assumption/assertation, value/logic, experience and common sense makes up the greatest proportion of online posts and replies (58%), while more objective types of information, including citation information, knowledge and examples, made up only 42% of the total sample. This seems not to support what deliberative theory suggests: that participants can also benefit from deliberative conversations as a learning process helping them with their cognitive ability to deal with information.

However, more questions need to be answered at this point. For example, what is the impression of the online deliberation environment for quiet participants? Do they express the same negative feedback, and consider online deliberation to be full of abusive, and subjective and rude expressions? How do such homogenous and antagonistic environments influence quiet participants in online deliberation engagement, and how do they contribute in forming

such an online information situation in deliberation? Can the analysis of online deliberation as an information base can tell the real story about the quiet participants who are the group of people mainly engaging in non-textual way such as posting simple messages, sharing, liking, and viewing? Are they recognized as incapable too? And how does online deliberation help them with their abilities? Therefore, I take a further step, and seek for clues behind the phenomena for understanding more from the interviews.

8.2.1.2 Findings and interpretation from the interviews

By further investigating the interview materials, I found that firstly the traditional understanding of consensus still has significant impact to the expressive behaviors of quiet participants. As I learned, the instrumental role of consensus in offline communications is valued in its substantial meaning given in the culture. It is to say, people usually keep some opinions to themselves to enable harmonious social relations, even though they would like to express these different opinions. As such, although opinion expression is the basic function for internet application, most of quiet participants are still inclined to express themselves in a form of being supportive. The difference is, the online settings offers the opportunity for all types of opinion to be expressed. The finding shows, being supportive is the main form of expression for quiet participants. Most of quiet participants can express their opinions by liking and sharing the opinion information they agree on. Quite a few also engage deliberation by offering more supplementary information to support the opinion group. Some others always include critical and opposing opinion information in a supportive form of opinion message. It therefore becomes the major evidential information resource in online deliberation. Also, it offers a possible explanation for why the evidential information decline of the supporting opinion group as the majority opinion camp is more dramatic in a homogenous environment. However, as a result, consensus, on the individual level, is not considered in deliberative theory to be the main purpose and driving force for people to engage or form their opinions (Cohen 1997; Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2006), as the majority only consider online deliberation as an information-learning, or self-performing process. So, the question is, what determines whether participants engage in online deliberation?

Finding the answer to this involves another finding of the study, the polarity effect, being quiet or being argumentative, which is resulted in a great dilemma created in the online communicative world, between the difficulties brought from the online communicative settings and the need of self-expressing for quiet participants. As I discovered, the quiet participants

are a group of people who have a high expectation of themselves through online opinion-expression as a self-imagine presence, both on the levels of morality and cognition. On the other hand, it makes their willingness of expression more likely to be affected by the side effect governed by platform settings, such as invisibility, publicness, task-orientation and temporality. As a result, seeking common ground is key to successful deliberation for them. They prefer to exchange opinions with someone who has similar backgrounds, values, experience, knowledge-level, and interest for example. These attributes would favor their acceptance and recognition of self-expression. However, unlike the offline environment, the online communicative settings do not create favorable conditions at this point. It becomes part of the reason they are quiet online, choosing to stay away the text-based opinion expression.

It is also found that it triggers a kind of expressive behavior coined "impulsive expression". Under the joint action of the "face" and the Chinese modesty culture, quiet participants are "spoiled" by the offline harmonious communications. When facing the online communicative situation which is more diverse and more opinion-directed, we are surprised to see the "face" and the modest Chinese culture has been having the opposite effect on those participants, making them more self-performance-driving, competitive, argumentative, and insistent in reasoning. What is more interesting, such homophilous intentions, namely expressing opposing opinions in a supportive way, can give promote heterophilous behaviors of quiet participants. Once they are engaged in an antagonistic deliberation, which could be developed from a homogenous one, the conflicting discourse can become the motive, forcing them stay in reasoning, and contribute to information increment.

Speaking on the aspect of cognitive ability of online participants, I found, the ability that quiet participants have for collecting, analyzing and absorbing information for opinion formation is comparatively high and independent from the online deliberation process. Firstly, the information preference of quiet participants is more logical, factual and professional. They know more about one topic and form their opinions mainly through searching online, seeking information on websites, reading official news and any professional materials. The information from resources like that is rawer, more loose, objective and diverse. Considering what I have found from the online materials, it leads to the conclusion that the online deliberation as an information base may not be very attractive to quiet participants for information-acquisition. In fact, this point is also proved by the interviews, as most participants mentioned that are barely influenced by other people's opinions once they have initiated their own ideas, which is

what usually happens before they engage in online deliberation, either textually or non-textually.

However, if there is any influence from online deliberation, it may improve their cognitive ability for forming opinions in a way to get their original opinions confirmed and strengthened. According to the interviews, the quiet participants are not completely sealed from online opinion information. For them, online opinions play a role in triggering their curiosity and thinking as a fore-process, preparing for deliberation engagement. Taking this opportunity, I found that quiet participants can be greatly challenged by the ability of being responsive and inclusive to different opinions, especially under the function of the "face" and Chinese modesty culture. They prefer to shelve disputes rather than to confront them. That then causes them to be more likely to be attracted by similar opinions online to confirm and improve the idea already in mind. More importantly, the fact that they can manage and select information and make up their minds can make it even harder for others to alter their stance on topics when they actually engage deliberation with their own developed opinions.

From the perspective of information-giving, I found the process of preparing to engage online deliberation by expressing their own opinions can actually be a forced learning process, beneficial to their abilities. Once again, the "face" culture and Chinese modesty makes online textual expression the major contributing factor in discursive image management. Dropping out is considered as the most common strategy for quiet participants guarding their opinions without experiencing negative emotional effects. However, this is not the way quiet participants usually act in reality. As I found, they most likely choose not to participate in the first place rather dropping the conversation once engaged in it. Such "responsibility", even though compelled, stimulates them to take opinion-forming and opinion-expression as a serious learning process. Not only do they have to collect and learn relevant professional information and knowledge, investing time in thinking and analysing, but also learn how to use them to reason with, criticize and persuade other people in a very short amount of time.

In conclusion, the study found out that on the cognitive level, online deliberation can present very different situations from the ideal deliberation model expected based on the offline communicative experience. But taking into account the social, political and cultural context, they do not necessarily deliver negative outcomes. For example, considering the contextual background in China, the homogenous circumstance of expression in a form of support seems

to also make sense, and in fact may contribute to the information increment of deliberation, since it enables opinion expression, especially for those different ones. On the contrary, a heterogeneous information environment is not always beneficial to opinion expression. As in this study, even though the abusive messages are not counted as a serious problem, the antagonism and abusiveness found in the emotional climate when differences of opinion exist is majorly responsible for the one-time expression or inexpression of quiet participants.

In addition, online, we cannot jump into the conclusion only based on visualized and direct recognitions, relying on a single result set, or a single research method. As what is found in this study, to approach quiet participants with a perspective of context, the influence of deliberation has on the cognitive level is to a large extent passive, impulsive, indirect and unconscious. Especially when we consider the typology of internet users, the conclusion, even though addressed on a macro level, cannot be general. Instead, some indirect and implicit factors are reflected on the individual level, such as the expression of habits, personal preferences, and the perception of the emotional environment. The deliberative thoughts and patterns rooted in such unintuitive experiences can potentially influence the environment contributing to different outcomes of deliberation.

8.2.2 Understanding online deliberation on a moral level

8.2.2.1 Findings and interpretation from online materials

The exploration of the moral aspect of online deliberation in this study is mainly on two levels. First, from a macro perspective, related discussions of the ideal deliberation model involving the deliberative relationship between an advantaged group and a disadvantaged group (Foley and Edwards, 1996; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996). A typical example is the deliberative relationship between the government and the public in decision-making processes. Based on this model, the value of moral deliberation is believed to lie to a great extent in whether or not the advantaged group applies their power in a moral sense to ensure the voice of the disadvantaged group is heard and responded to. From a micro perspective, related discussions have extended on the individual level, talking about deliberation relationship within groups, and between a majority group and a minority group (Wood et al., 1994; David and Turner, 1996). Deliberative theory, at this point, rests on equality, which means that moral standards are set to make sure the minorities have an effective say. In that sense, to be deliberatively moral means to ask the minority group to be more insistent,

uncompromising and solid so that their voice can be heard, their opinions can be properly responded to, and their interests can be protected, (Wood et al., 1994; Smith et al., 1996).

By modelling the interaction between different opinion groups online, I found the moral aspects occurred on the simple opinion groups in all five randomly selected cases, which can be understood within the subject of morality in deliberative theory. To be specific, the simple opinion group in two cases, also as the advantaged opinion group, displays more intense interactivity with the disadvantage opinion group in the deliberation. In other three deliberation cases, the simple opinion group, as a part of the minority opinion camp, is more interactive within the opinion camp with individuals who have the same opinions than from the majority opinion camp. However, to study everyday deliberation activities, such as the online forum style of deliberation in this study, the dimension of morality applied to discuss individual participation can be slightly different from the ideal deliberation model, which is more likely to be understood as moral intuition that is elicited instantaneously through perception. Such understanding seems to involve more discussions on the individual level. Especially, when online platform settings are taken into the account, the need to bring the moral understanding to the individual level is highlighted even more. Taking the timeline in online deliberation for example, the opinion is temporary, and could only represent one's preference at that moment. In that case, we can argue that the nature of moral intuition is momentary. I also noticed it therefore involves other influential factors playing a role for online expression, for example the opinion climate. Even though opinion preference can be largely affected by opinion climate in general, the partial or situational opinion climate perceived personally during opinion expression could matter more on an individual level. Therefore, the moral phenomena need to be understood with more clues from interview materials on the personal level.

8.2.2.2 Findings and interpretation from the interviews

This study found three dialogic characteristics rooted in traditional communicative culture and concepts that may contribute to quiet participant's intuitive online moral behaviours concerning deliberation. The first is the high sensitivity of Chinese people to different opinions online. Under the traditional communicative culture, the study discovered two major evolutions of moral understanding which result from an online communicative environment for quiet participants. One is self-value, which is not encouraged in traditional culture and moral society, has been transformed, being presented in a form of collective value with the help of the online discourse settings. It promotes an online discourse culture that creates and achieves self-value

through opinion expression. The second, as it has been erased to a large extent the function of visual factors such as body language and facial expression in offline environment for emotional expression, the online deliberation opens the door for emotional expression which has been suppressed by offline expression, especially for those negative and intense ones in mainly appeal to words. When quiet participants place themselves in a communicative environment which is more diverse, public, open and interactive, I found, engaging with their opinions does not lead to opinion transformation based on mutual respect and understanding.

A second characteristic is the other-oriented mode of expression built upon Guanxi (social relationship). This explains considerateness as a dynamic balance between other-orientation and self-realization, rather than a motivation simply to agree with other people. The study found that being considerate in reality is recognised with its purposefulness value, namely the Guanxi resource, which is only embodied in good social relationship management. The large change of online social norms has changed people's moral orientation, from being other-oriented in pursuit of Guanxi to being self-oriented and built upon self-value realization. Under the standard, I found that the other-oriented behaviour and thought achieved as moral intuition largely depends on the emotional experience which is perceived by quiet participants during the deliberation process. Therefore, more negative emotional experiences could cause fewer intuitively considerate behaviours and thoughts.

The final characteristic is that participants tend to build up their discursive authority through textual expression. The study found that in online communications, when the deliberation involved topics quiet participants were familiar with, they preferred to express their ideas in more humorous, straightforward and popular ways. They also armed themselves with professional knowledge and logic as deeply as possible. The moral value in this case is that participants were more likely to put real effort into their struggle for discursive authority, for example by collecting high-quality information and acquiring knowledge quickly. One of the consequences of the high investment of time and energy is that quiet participants are more likely to be demanding about the person they "talk" to during deliberation. I found these people to be of the same cognitive ability, education and intelligence. The impact between the discourse featured by certain language styles and participant's deliberation identity can be mutual. For one, language style can be recognised as a signature, and can further contribute and develop such sustainable interactions. Also, the discourse developed based on the language used can help the participants grow and confirm a more collective deliberation identity in a

more intimate sense based on similar professionalism, experience and values. In that sense, the nature of engaging in deliberation is rather exclusive than inclusive.

In addition, the study also comes to some conclusions addressed on the non-textual expressive behaviours and participation. For quiet participants, moral intuition is not only reflected in the text-based expression, but more importantly also the non-textual participative behaviours in deliberation. As what I found in interviews, applying non-textual participation online, it largely benefits people with self-reflection by taking a self-distanced perspective. In online settings, information-taking can be separated from opinion expression. Without posting opinions online, I found that quiet participants can avoid unnecessary self-focus and public evaluation pressure, have their emotions more under control, and respond more truthfully with their thoughts and ideas. In this state, self-reflection, according to deliberative theory, is made more possible as participants tend to take an outsider's perspective. They fulfil a positive and active cognitive construction led by people's interest, being oriented by solving problems as an ultimate purpose (Habermas, 1971).

Moreover, the findings show that the action of 'liking' and giving could help to create another level of opinion climate which is promising for opinion expression by minorities in deliberation. The study argued liking and simple opinion sharing cannot be simply understood as the quiet participants being unwilling or unable to engage in more complicated deliberative conversations. Rather, on the individual level, they can be understood as a response to the online opinion climate they observe and perceive. Especially considering quiet participants, I found they are particularly sensitive to the public opinion environment. However, what makes it interesting is that the opinion environment is rather personal than general for them. What influences their expressive behaviours the most is usually the momentary or situational opinion climate they perceive from very limited online opinion review functioning as a thought-trigger. Moreover, I found that simple opinion expression and 'liking' is especially preferred when the opinion climate they sense is confronted with their opinions, because with this simpler and easier course of action, they can still have their "unpopular" opinion heard without being judged or forced to engage in unpleasant argument. The study suggested, for quiet participants who are normally less keen to engage in more complex deliberation with opinion expression in writing, their opinion could not be the minority opinion in any real sense. With the help of indirect expression such as 'liking', they could create the opinion climate on another level,

promoting the expression of unpopular opinions or arise doubts among the potential participants and lurks pursuing true or different opinions.

In conclusion, the moral intuition reflected in online deliberation turns out to be diversified and multidimensional, depending on the different outcomes, different influences delivered by the deliberation, different types of participants, and different ways they have their opinion expressed. In this study, the moral meaning embodied in the action of quiet participants, when they express their opinion in writing as individuals, may not represent the high level of morality expected in the ideal deliberation model. The deliberation does not cultivate them to be more mutually respectful, considerate and inclusive, but quite the opposite. In reality with deliberation however, what distinguishes them as a special group of participants online is the non-textual expression and participative behaviors. On this level, the study has concluded some positive results by considering the local communicative context. Even though the moral value cannot be fully achieved in the sense of interactivity for one-way deliberation activities, namely only involving information-taking without information-giving, they have launched the interactivity in a dimension of self-deliberation, which values the meaning of morality in a self-distanced way of deliberative thinking, as active and positive self-reflection. By developing the findings from the individual dimension, the study is also able to reach a deeper understanding of the online phenomena detected from the online posts and replies on the macro level that how "liking" and simple opinion expression manages to deliver the potential moral influence through online deliberation.

8.3 Limitations of the study

With the research almost complete, there still remains scope for further study. Firstly, on the topic of methodology design, the analysis of the online posts and replies is based on a model of one-time visit/participation in online forums, namely seeing one participant only expresses their opinion once in online discussion. However, it must be admitted that the actual participation in online forums is based on long-term attention and sequential discussions of participants on certain public topics. Namely, people read the messages from online forum, taking a wait-and-see attitude or expressing their opinions, and being supportive or critical to the current posts and comments. The actions can be implemented by the same participants, and happen multiple times in one deliberation process. However, over time, it is hard for the study to distinguish the difference between those actions. Besides, the identity of the online opinion expressers is also a tricky problem. For example, considering people of different backgrounds,

ages, cognitive abilities, knowledge levels and experience, it could be that different clues can be interpreted by individual participants, for building up different understandings in the context of deliberation on the cognitive and moral level.

Secondly, I hope to maximize the use of the research materials from both the online forum and the interviews by undertaking a more detailed quantitative analysis. Owing to the limited scope of the study, qualitative analysis is the method mainly used in this research while only basic statistical analysis has been utilized as necessary. However, quantitative analysis in empirical studies is of paramount importance, especially for discovering new phenomena in contrasting analysis with findings discovered through other research methods.

Thirdly, if time permits, the study could collect more evidence for studying other types of participants through interviews. For this research, I only targeted the quiet participants who participate mainly in a non-textual way in online deliberation. Although the sample contributes to the understanding of Chinese online society, text-based opinion expressers as significant part of the online participant population is also of great research value. To further complete the understanding of the online society in China, the analysis addressing their deliberative behaviors and thinking will be the focus of further study.

8.4 Direction for future research

Against the background and limitation of the study, there are some suggestions to be pointed out for future research. First, on the explanatory side, more attention could be paid to explore and develop a deliberation model used for understanding the online society from an individual's perspective. The early years of deliberative theory studies propose a deliberation model that is widely accepted as a responsive reasoning process (Chambers, 2003; Thompson, 2008; Gutmann and Thompson, 2000), providing a series of normative standards to define what counts as good deliberation. Quite recently, deliberation studies shifted their focus from formal institutional deliberation as an instrumental political process between political elites to a more daily, informal, dialogic communication between normal citizens by taking a micro perspective (Steiner et al., 2004; Kim and Kim, 2008). Following this direction, the instrumental role of deliberation also lies in particular discursive interaction happening on an ordinary everyday basis. This is because some research findings have introduced new evidence, such as communicative taste, emotion, temperament and deliberation identity, to understand the theory from a more micro and individual perspective (for example, van Stokkom, 2003; Eliasoph, 1998; Tannen, 1994). By following that line of research, the study has made some beneficial

attempts, discussing some findings discovered on the individual level by associating them in a Chinese political, social and cultural context, drawing the understanding of online society on a micro perspective under the frame of deliberation. Yet, the conclusions are only instructional, presented as an approval or a criticism in responding to the current basic deliberation model applied in the online communicative environment, but lack in inductive analysis and description to develop the specific deliberation model rooted in the culture of Chinese communication and the structure of Chinese discourse.

On the research design side, deliberative theory could be applied in the analysis of online behavior of different types of internet users on different types of platforms. Some social media platforms, for example Wechat and Weibo, may not be designed particularly for public discourse to be their major function, but they also enable the online users to engage, consciously or subconsciously, the lively and serious discussions developing around public topics. Taking deliberative theory as an approach, the study on the online communicative behaviors and phenomena can enrich our understanding of online society. Meanwhile, the discussions targeting different typologies of online users, for example the opinion leader, the moderator and the opinion follower, could also be the focus of further studies. By considering the typology of online users, we better analyse and understand the fragmentation of online citizens as different internet users, and better extract the common patterns responding to the different forms of media use in the context of online communication.

To further develop deliberative practices, the future studies could try to understand the online society by paying more attention to other structural conditions that may influence the online communicative behaviors and thoughts of participants in one way or another. In this study, we have introduced Chinese culture including harmony, modesty, Chinese “face”, and Guanxi to the interpretation of online phenomena. Some other factors relating to the impact of contextual features and online platform settings, such as the opinion climate, the establishment of online identity, the extent to which the conversation is question is in the public domain, and the emotional expression, can also be used for examining some potential relationships and influences that structural arrangements cannot explain.

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